

THE SECKFORDS OF SECKFORD HALL.

BY VINCENT BURROUGH REDSTONE.

Seckford Hall stands off from the highway, and comes suddenly into view as the pedestrian ascends either of two neighbouring hills. It is surrounded by undulating fields, called *parks*; the many swales and ridges, together with clusters of sombre firs, form a most pleasing prospect. The old Elizabethan dwelling bears unmistakeable signs of the grandeur and vicissitudes of the times of the last three centuries, wherein the statesman and landed-squire have given place to the sturdy yeoman, as tenant.

Upon the exterior walls are fixed the various Coats of Arms quartered with those of Seckford. The most conspicuous of these coats are those representing the arms of the Hunter, Hackford, and Jenney families. Within the interior may be seen the fleur de lis and Tudor Rose, which adorn many of the noble residences erected in the days of Henry VIII. The most interesting portion of the house is the remains of a spacious guest-room, which still retains its galleries, whence musicians viewed the feast, and the massive andirons upon which many a yule log has blazed and hissed. The galleries retain their ancient position through the support of fluted wooden pillars erected in the days of George IV. Such a dwelling as Seckford Hall cannot be without its Tradition and its Ghost. Tradition asserts that his Satanic Majesty during the hours of darkness moved the foundations across the road when the residence was being erected; and a restless "unlaid" spirit supplies the superstitious peasantry with a ghost. It is not known who was the actual founder of the Hall. Either Thomas Seckford, who was the chief restorer of Great Bealings Church, or else his son Thomas, who died at Bealings Magna, in 1575, was its first occupier.

By a curious coincidence these Seckfords were descendants of the Sekfords de Sekford (Sedgeford),* County Norfolk. The Manor of Sekford,† lying between the Parishes of Bealings and Martlesham, existed during the time of the Domesday Book survey. In King Edward the Confessor's days it was held by Aluric, son of Ulviet, under commendation to Harold. After the Conquest it formed part of the domains of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, and was held by Robert Bigot. The Manor takes its name from the shallow *reed*y (A.S. *secg*. a reed) ford where the highway passes over the river Fynn, a tributary of the Deben. Until very recently the bridge which spans the river at this spot was known as Seckford Bridge. The name of the hamlet of Suffolk, like that of the neighbouring County, has passed under various spellings, Seccheford and Sekeford being the names of most frequent occurrence.

A genealogist tracing the pedigree of the Sekfords would start from William de Sekford,‡ who lived before the days of Richard I. "Bartholomew fil. Willi de Sekford dēb. v. m. ut loqula audiatur in Curia int. *ēū* et Hamel. Bart. de Middleton," 1189. The descent may be continued by means of an existing charter, § signed in 1286 by William, son of Robert, son of Bartholomew de Sekford, "pro Priore et Conventu Ecc. S. Trinit. de Norwich." This William de Sekford was a benefactor to the religious house of Norwich. || On the 15th February, 1286, licence was granted for the alienation in mortmain to the Prior and Convent of Holy Trinity, Norwich, of a messuage, together with twenty acres, two roods of land in Thornham, by William son of Robert de Seccheford. This is probably the William Sekford, ¶ placed by an historian of Ipswich amongst the list of Priors of Holy Trinity, and of the Monastery of S. Peter and S. Paul in Ipswich, who resigned in 1289. A recent writer discredits the fact that Sekford

* Blomefield; Norfolk, sub, West Harling.

† Lord John Hervey's translation, sub. Sekeforda.

‡ Pipe Rolls, 1 Richard I., page 45. § Bodleian Charter, 13 Ed. I.!

|| Calendar of Patent Rolls. ¶ Wodderspoon's "Memorials of Ipswich."

was Prior of Holy Trinity, Ipswich,* but a charter signed by William, † Prior of this Monastery in 1286; on behalf of the Ipswich Burgesses, appears to confirm the former statement. The earliest Sekfords held office in the Church. ‡ John Sekford was presented to the Church of Combes in the Diocese of Norwich, in the King's gift, 3 June 1308.§ A grant was made by William Shepherd, of Dartford, Kent, to Sir Thomas Sekford, perpetual Curate of that Parish, and three other persons, of a yearly rent of seven gallons of oil for the maintenance of a lamp hanging in the nave of the Parish Church, before the High Cross, the Sunday after the feast of S. Augustine, 41 Edward III. A letter was forwarded by the Pope to John de Seckford, || donsel (Lt. dominicellus, a secular canon) and Joan his wife of the Diocese of Norwich, 4 Non. March, 1353. This is probably the John de Sekford, ¶ Clericus v. comp. de vi¹ de firma terra in Sekford and Debenham in Co. Suffolk, q. fuer. in man. Regis occōne junioris aetatis filii et here. de Andrew de Sakeville defunct.** He was the first of the Norfolk Sekfords who settled in Suffolk.

At this period the Sekfords held high positions as merchants in the cities of London and Norwich. Andrew de Seccheford † † in his will dated 12 Mar. 1348, desired to be buried in S. Mary's Chapel in the Church of S. Vedast, and bequeathed to Henry, son of Henry Seccheford, Alderman of Aldersgate Ward, his brewery houses and rents in S. Martin le Quern. A Thomas de Seccheford † † was burgess of Lynn, March, 1309. The greater portion of the land in Sekford, Co. Norfolk, had been granted to the Priory of Norwich, but this fact did not prevent Henry Sekford and William Sekford, §§ brothers, from enclosing two sheep-folds in that Manor. These the inhabitants pulled down, asserting that the Prior alone possessed the right to erect sheep-folds, but the Sekfords asserted that the right

* Corder's "History of Christchurch." † Bacon's "Annals of Ipswich."

‡ Calendar of Patent Rolls. § His. MSS. Commission Report, p. 422.

|| Papal Letters, Record Office. ¶ Davy MSS. ** Page's "Suffolk," p. 513.

† † Court of Hustings' Records. † † Calendar of Patent Rolls.

§ § Placita Coram Rege, 2 Ed. III., Record Office.

had always been theirs. The original Seckford * Coat of Arms was "Ermine, an escallop in fess gules," and was in the Austin Friar's Church, Norwich, for a George Seckford. The Crest was a Cock. The escallop denoting the performance of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land was subsequently changed for the more religious emblem of three escallops, which marked the arms borne by the Seckfords of West Harling and Bealings. When the Sekfords no longer held office in the Church the Knightly squires changed their crest, the Cock of S. Peter, for the Sportsman's dog, the Talbot. A Robert Seccheford, † Armiger, accompanied the King of Castile to Spain in 1386.

In 1335 the Priest, Sir John Sekford, obtained the right of free warren in Woodbridge, previously held by Bartholomew Ellingham, and Gilbert de Pecche.

The Manor of Bealings Magna ‡ formed part of the lands of Robert Todenham, who also held possession of the Advowson of Bealings Church. § The Manor of Sekford had descended from the Bigods to Mary, Countess of Norfolk, wife of Thomas de Brotherton, relict of Radulphus de Cobham. The former manor became the property of the Sekfords about 1370—1400. Great Bealings Hall stood in a field adjacent to the Parish Church, the advowson of which was held by Sir George Sekford in 1450. The Sekfords were styled Sekfords of Bealings Magna until the year 1553. Subsequently in documents referring to the transfer of lands in the neighbourhood, Charles Sekford, heir and grandson of Thomas Sekford who died 1575, is called Sekford of Sekford Hall; his uncle John held the title of John Sekford of Bealings Manor. It is probable, then, that the estate of Sekford Manor passed into the hands of the family at the time of the erection of Sekford Hall (1553—1575).

The Sekfords were merchants as well as priests and knights. On 26 February 1440, || licence was granted to John

* Blomefield's "History of Norfolk." † Rymer's "Fœdera," vol. vii., p. 500.

‡ I. P. M. 15 Edward III. § I. P. M. 36 Edward III.

|| Rymer's "Fœdera," Henry V., Part 1, p. 75.

Seccheford and John Candeler, both of Bealings, to export corn and other victuals to Iceland for the use of the Bishop of Schalhette, and confessor of the King of Denmark. In 1575 * the customer of Milford Haven complained to Cecil, Lord Burghley, of the frauds committed by Thomas Sekford in the shipment of corn and malt, and in the smuggling of hops. The crew of one of his vessels were apprehended, 1583, for the spoil committed upon the ship of Herman Van Oldinshed, merchant, of Lubeck. Henry Sekford † petitioned the Queen's Council for payment for supplies furnished to the Venetian argosy brought into Plymouth, 1590; and for recompense for the attendance of his ship upon the said argosy. It is probable that his prayer was not heard, for in 1592 he was mulcted in a heavy fine of £12,000 for an attack made by the crew of his ship upon the Venetian merchantman, "Uggera Salvagnia." ‡ Henry Sekford § had incurred heavy debts in connection with the performance of his office as Keeper of the Priory Purse, and in attending Elizabeth upon her royal progresses. Clement Draper, of Woodbridge, complained to Her Majesty that Sekford "borrowed ready-money of him, and pretended by his service to be privileged to the use of poor men's goods at his pleasure, and to pay when he willed or not at all." The Queen had not paid Sekford for provisions supplied by him to the army in Ireland. || In 1598 a warrant was issued to strike tallies on the customers of the port of London for 980 crowns for Henry Sekford and others as the Queen's reward towards their building four ships. Sekford was re-appointed to his office of Keeper or Groom of the Privy Purse, upon the accession of James I.; and also received the gratuities arising from the position of Master of Tents and Pavilion. He was Knighted at Charterhouse, 11 May, 1603.

Thomas Sekford, ¶ brother of Henry, and founder of

* Calendar of State Papers, Domes. Series. † Report on Westmoreland MSS., Part iv.

‡ Calendar of State Papers, Domes. Series.

§ Nicoll's Royal Progresses of Elizabeth and James I.

|| Calendar of State Papers, Domes. Series.

¶ Register of Gonville and Caius Coll. Cam.

the Seckford Charity, Woodbridge, was educated at Gonville and Caius Coll., Cambridge. He entered Gray's Inn * as a Student, in 1540; his name in the register stands next to that of Cecil, Lord Burghley. He became barrister 1542, ancient 1547, and Lent reader 1556. He was sworn one of the Masters of Request in Ordinary, 9 December, 1558.† In 1559 the Burgesses of Ipswich elected him to represent them in Parliament, an honour again conferred upon him in 1572, the year following that upon which he was made Knight of the Shire for the County of Suffolk. He received the grant of lands held by the Manor of the Priory of Woodbridge for the sum of nearly eight hundred pounds paid into the Treasury, and likewise purchased lands at Felixstow. He held at his death the Manor of Over-Hall, Dedham, which was in pre-Reformation days the property of Campsey Ashe Priory.‡ About this time he built a noble mansion at the end of S. James' Walk, Clerkenwell, § which he named Woodbridge Hall, and wherein he detained as prisoner his cousin, Lady Margaret Clifford. He erected also the Great House, or Seckford House, which is frequently alluded to in the Churchwardens' accounts of S. Matthew's, Ipswich. At his death in 1587, it descended to Charles, son of Francis Seckford, who, being the next heir at the death of Thomas Seckford, his grandfather, then held the Manors of Seckford Hall and of Great Bealings. Charles Seckford sat for Aldeburgh in the Parliament of 1572, his grandfather sat for Orford during the reign of Queen Mary. Charles Seckford married Mary Steyning, || daughter of Frances, Countess of Norfolk, widow of the Earl of Surrey, who was beheaded the 21 January, 1547.

An extract from the Manor Rolls of Woodbridge late Priory illustrates the remark of a recent historian, ¶ that "even the first well meant efforts of Corporations to shut pigs out of their streets, and banish wandering dogs, by

* Register of Gray's Inn.

† Strype's Annals, Vol. I., p. 31. Bacon's Annals. Davy's MSS., Brit. Mus. Fitch's MSS., Ipswich Mus.

‡ I. P. M. Record Office. § Strickland's Tudor Princesses.

|| Green's "Framlingham," p. 91.

¶ Mrs. Green's "Town Life in the 15th Century," Vol. ii., p. 30.

levying fines from any inhabitant who had an 'irrational animal going about' in the churchyard or the market doubtless added to the dangers of the pestilence by removing the only scavenger known to the early Borough." Sir Humphrey Seckford, Knt.* and twenty other tenants permitted their pigs to go at large in the Churchyard, market, and street, to the hurt of their neighbours, and the Lord of the Manor. They were warned no longer to permit this nuisance under penalty by whatever pig is bought at large in these place, twopence.

Litigation appears to have been the cause of the downfall of the Seckford family.† Mary Seckford, who came to the estate of her husband in 1592, entered upon a suit to compel Robert Fisher to give an account of all rents and fines accruing from the Manors of Great Bealings and Seckford Hall. Thomas Seckford, ‡ who was Knighted at Newmarket, the 5th March, 1607, became possessor of the entire Seckford estates at his mother's death in 1596. They devolved upon his son Thomas, who at the time of his father's death, in 1610, was only two years of age. He died whilst a student at Trinity College, Cambridge, 1624, and his uncle Henry erected a monument to his memory in the Chapel of that College. An oil painting of this youth hangs upon the walls of the Seckford Lending Library, Woodbridge. There are also portraits of his great, great grandfather, Thomas, and of his cousin, Dorothy Seckford, to be seen in the Library. His sister Mary § married Sir Antony Cage, of Ipswich, who disputed the legitimacy of Henry Seckford, of Clerkenwell; heavy law expenses were incurred by all parties to the suit which was decided in favour of Henry Seckford. Cage sold Seckford House, Ipswich, to Sir Robert Hitcham, of Framlingham, 1631, whither the true portrait of the Woodbridge benefactor was conveyed. The inhabitants of Woodbridge sold town property to defend their cause, and the inmates of the

* Court Rolls of Woodbridge Manor, late Priory, 1585.

† Causes in Chancery, temp. Elizabeth, No. 41.

‡ Davy's MSS., Brit. Mus.

§ Chancery Proceedings, 1633. Churchwardens' Account Books.

almshouses forwarded a petition to Sir Harbottle Grimston, Master of the Rolls, stating that "on some pretence, or title unto us unknown, there is some obstruction in the receiving of the rents appointed for the payment of our pensions." The dispute rose so high that "John Warren, Churchwarden, was arrested in the town's cause," for which annoyance he received remuneration to the amount of two shillings.

Dorothy Seckford, wife of Henry Seckford, became owner of the estates upon her husband's death in 1638.

In 1650,* "one Gibbon laid claim to the Clerkenwell estates as John Seckford, and got possession of the house." He received the support of Lady Bedingfield, whose husband, an ardent Royalist, had been committed to the Tower. A force of military was needed to eject "the claimant" from "Seckford's Seat." The claim was renewed by Gibbon's wife after the Restoration, who by gift entitled the King to the house and garden, 25 May, 1669. The Woodbridge townfolk would not yield up their claim, and they readily paid "Mrs. Aldis ten shillings for healing old Stewart's wife of the hurt that Seckford's man gave her."

With Dorothy Seckford the name and family died out 1672. Descendants were left, who proved their connection with this ancient house by the adoption of the name, as Seckford Cage, Seckford Gosnold, Seckford Purpet, Seckford Drury, but even this mark is now swept away, and there remain only the noble Hall, and the still more noble Charity to make the name of Seckford a lasting one in the County of Suffolk.

Seckford Hall † in the days of the Commonwealth was occupied by Captain Robert Kirby, a staunch Cromwellian, and relative of the Seckfords. It was sold by Seckford Cage to Samuel Atkinson, Esq., of Croydon, in Surrey, and in 1844 was the property of James Morrison, Esq., M.P., by purchase.‡ It is now owned by Captain E. G. Pretyma, M.P.

* Churchwardens' Accounts, 1650—1669.

† Woodbridge Parish Register.

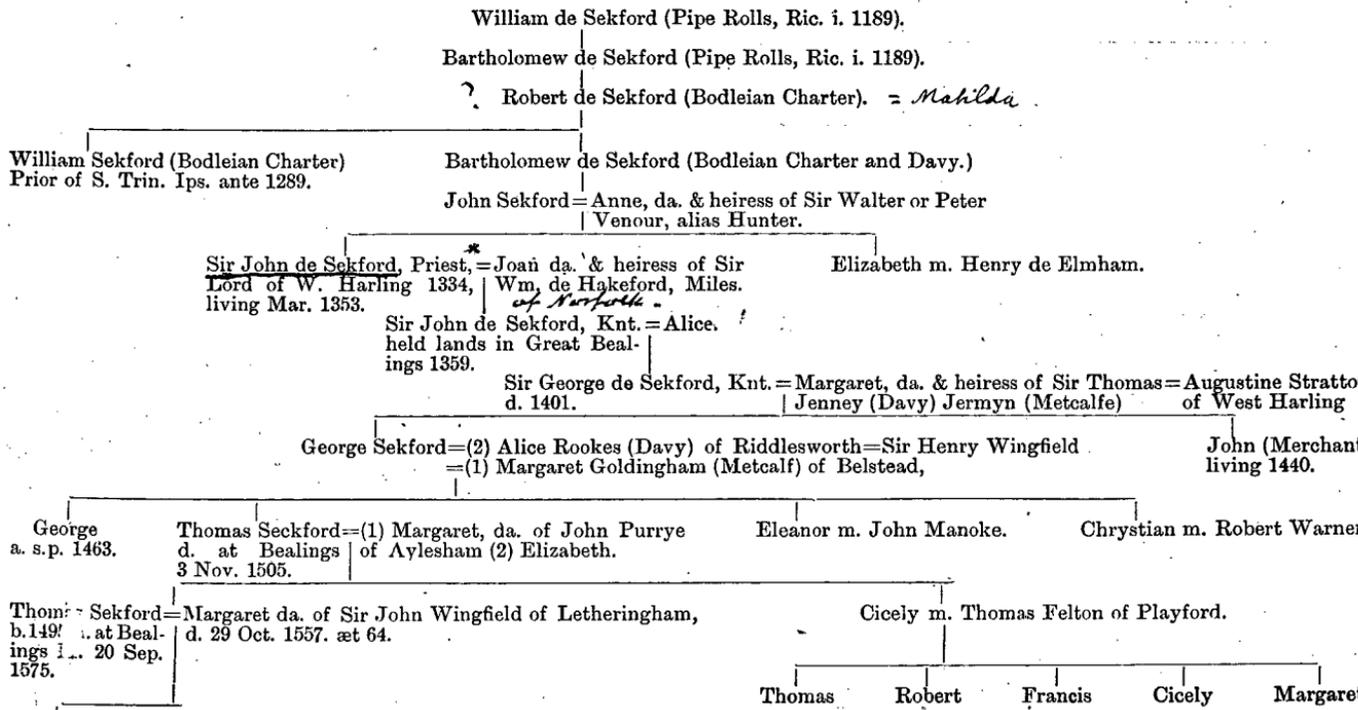
‡ Page's "Suffolk," p. 42.

The 17th of August of next following, he resigned in consideration of a pension of 10 mares - about half the income of the benefice. v. *History of Hessest. Proceedings of the Suff: East: of Archa: Vol. 11. p. 310.*

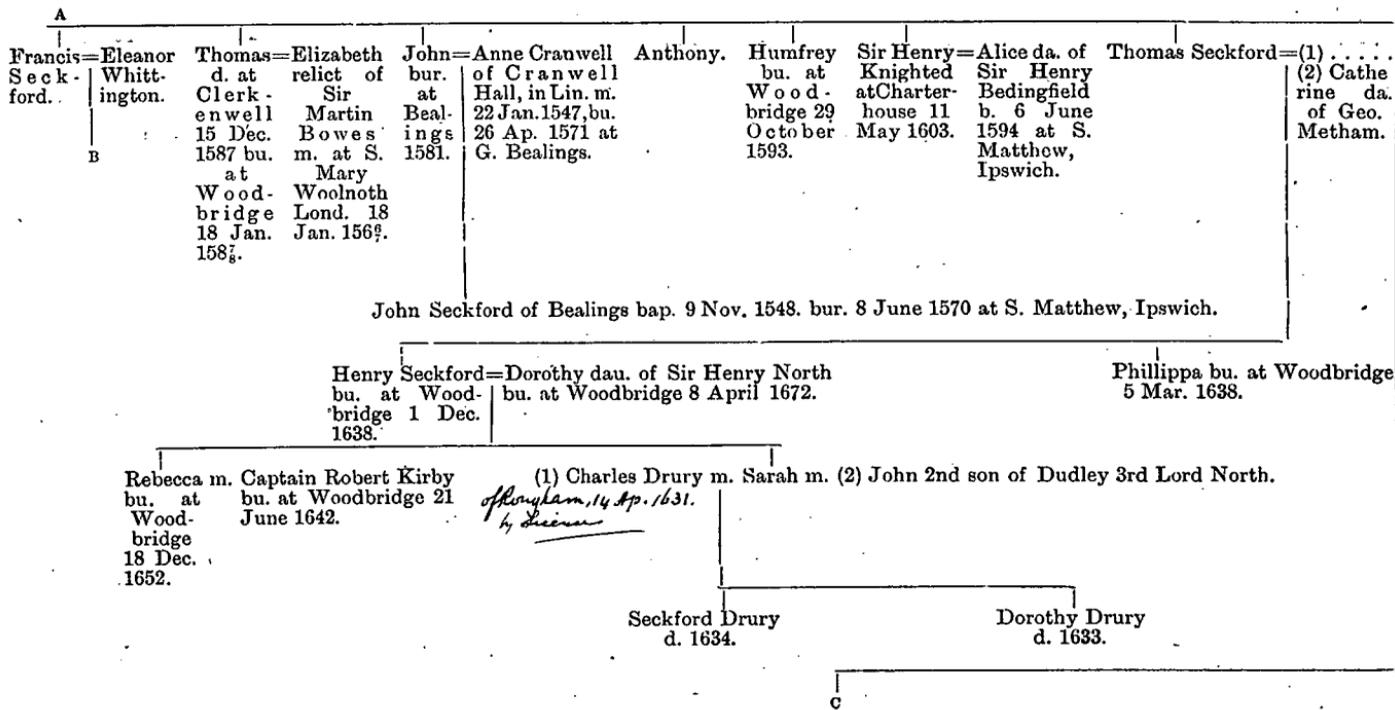
PEDIGREE OF THE SEKFORDS OF SEKFORD HALL.

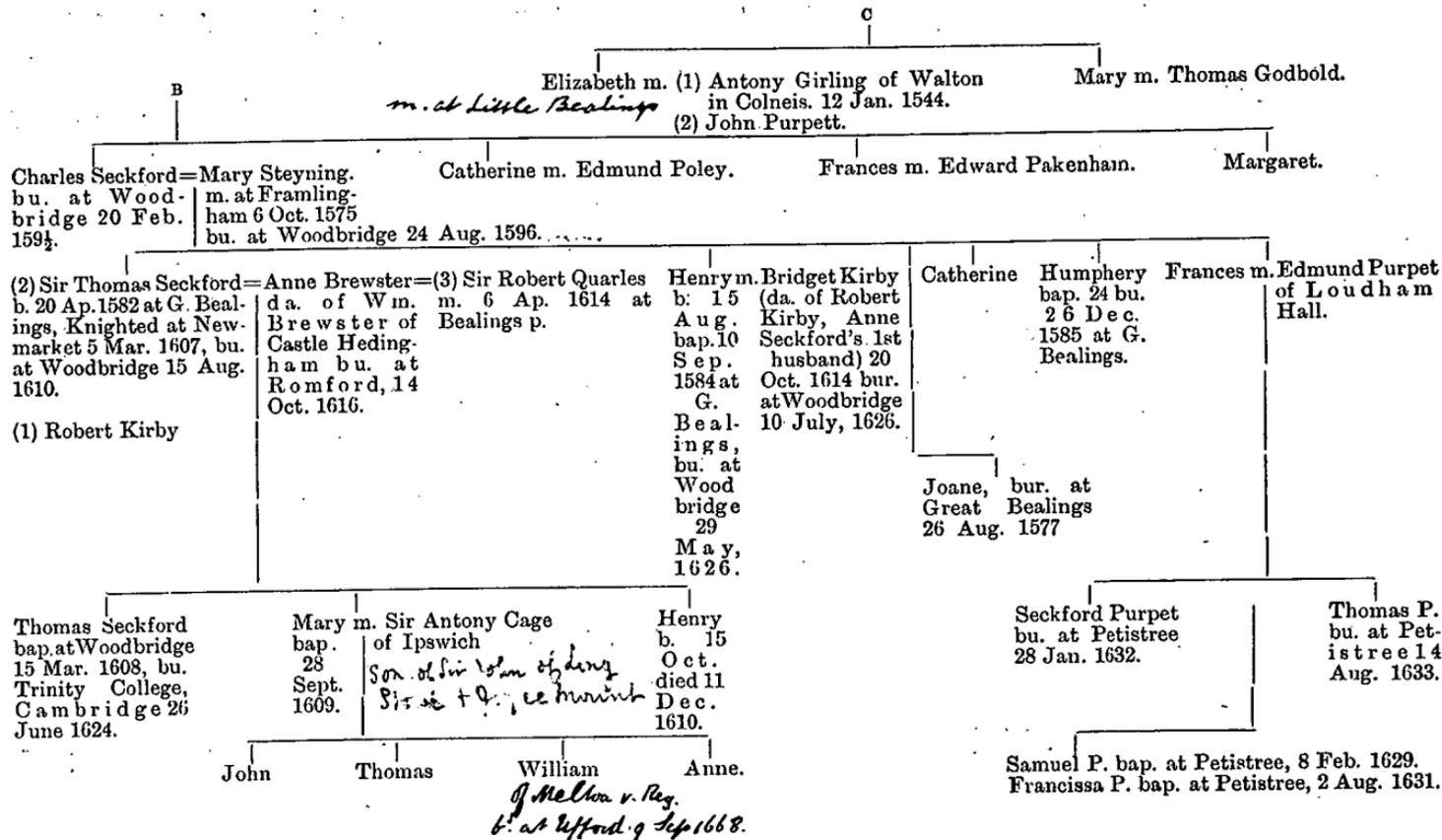
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^A q. Ed i. 28 Walter de Seccheford v. John del Hulle + Rose his wife in Hotteton.
 Feet of Fines 15. Ed i. 25 Gilbert de Chastillon v. Robert de Seccheford + Mahilda his wife in Kersaye,
 Laleseye + Whatefield.
 33 Ed iii. 15. John de Sekford, senior v. Godfrey de Aldewyke + Mahilda his wife in Henleye,
 B.M. ... Bresham Rashe in sta. Helonwygham, + Hemmyngton.





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