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Does the Don triptych portray the ancestors of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford? [Part 3 of 4]

Sir Griffith Don (1487?-c.1543), second son of Sir John Don, was a courtier noted for his physical prowess. He was a knight of the King's body for most of his life and, according to McFarlane, was "one of Henry VIII's chosen companions in the many physical exploits that marked that prince's adolescence and young manhood". A distinguished horseman, he took part in the jousts celebrating Mary Tudor's betrothal to Prince Charles of Castile in 1506; a letter to his brother, Edward, still conveys, almost five centuries later, his excitement at being chosen to participate in this spectacle:

To my right worshipful brother Edward, in haste. Right worshipful brother, I recommend me unto you in my most hearty wise. Sir, so it is, there shall be a great triumph now at Candlemas for the contract between the King of Castile's son and my lady Mary the costliest thing done that was this many years and by the King and my Lord Prince's desire and they that shall now run at the jousts the which names be for the first day challengers -- My Lord Harry of Buckingham, Sir John Pechy, Sir Rowland Master, St. John and Giles Capel. The answers to them -- My Lord of Kent, Charles Brandon, Thomas Kneyvett, John Car, Edward Nevill and my poor self. Now Sir the greatest cause of my writing unto you to desire you to be a good brother unto me at my greatest need this time, that it would please you to be a good brother, that I might have my mother's bequest that she bequeathed unto me, Sir I prove me willing to your own ordering and at your pleasure ye shall have me whilst I live, and moreover I will so bind me to be at your own award to me that it shall please you to send unto me this time in great need and in great haste as my trust lieth only in you, or I shall be shamed for evermore for all the remainder of my company saving myself is ready. With-

out your great kindness be shown unto me I wot not how to do unless I should have great losses by contracts that I must make if you should fail me. Howbeit my trust is in you only, and I trust to my power I will as well deserve to have your good will from this time forth as any man can do . . . (Newton Dunn 18).

Sir Griffith jousted in other important tournaments, including Henry VIII's coronation tournament in 1509 (where he was "one of Diana's champions in the jousts against the scholars of Pallas") and the Westminster tournament of 1511. In 1513 and 1532 he was in the retinue of Henry VIII at Calais, and in 1520 attended the lavish spectacle of the Field of the Cloth of Gold. In the military sphere, he was knighted in Brittany by Sir Edward Howard "for his good services against the French" and is said to have been "a brave man at arms" (McFarlane 54; Newton Dunn 17).

Historical records of the Tudor period document a number of occasions on which Henry VIII employed Sir Griffith Don in conveying gifts of horses to and from the Medici, Gonzaga and Este families. In October, 1514, for example, Guiliano de Medici expresses thanks to Henry VIII for "the gift of two caparisoned horses presented to him by Sir Griffith Don". In November of the same year, Francesco Gonzaga receives a present from Henry at the hands of Sir Griffith Don, and sends the King "twelve brood mares from his celebrated Mantuan stables". Alfonso d'Este in Ferrara also receives "two caparisoned palfreys and a horn" from Sir Griffith Don. A few years later, in a letter dated January 28, 1518 from Calais, Sir John Wilsher reports to the King that Sir Griffith Don has arrived:

with the goodliest sort of mares of the realm of Naples and other of Turkey, such as I have never seen in these parts, so as your grace shall be within a short while out of danger of any prince for coursers of Naples (McFarlane 54).

Sir Griffith Don was close enough to Henry VIII to be present at the christening of his son Edward, later Edward VI (Newton Dunn 17), and was a friend of Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, second husband of Henry VIII's sister, Mary Tudor. Their association spanned a lifetime, and the closeness of their relationship is demonstrated by the fact that Sir Griffith attended Brandon's marriage to his first wife, Anne Browne, in about 1503 and, when Don made his will forty years later in 1542, he stipulated that much of his clothing lay "in my chambr at my lorde of Suff place besides Westminster" (Gunn 203).

Sir Griffith Don married Elizabeth Roche-Eden (d.1541), called "the lady of Tir Mawr" and reputed to be "a lady of great wealth"; she was a widow at the time of the marriage, with a daughter, Grisold, who became the wife of Sir John Boteler of Woodhall. Philip Boteler, a grandson of Grisold Roche and Sir John Boteler, married Katherine Knollys and was thus a brother-in-law of Lettice Knollys, wife of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (McFarlane 57; Metcalfe 30, 111-2, App. I; Newton Dunn 17).

Sir Griffith Don and Elizabeth Roche-Eden had only one child, a daughter Elizabeth (d.1590), who was very young at the time of her parents' death and was placed, by the terms of her father's will, under the guardianship of Dr. John Hughes of Uxbridge, whose son Thomas (d.1587) she later married (McFarlane 54). Thomas Hughes and Elizabeth Don had two sons, John and Robert, and two daughters, Elspeth and Grisold (d.1613). It is claimed that Elspeth Hughes married Alexander (sic) Popham, Lord Chief Justice of England (Meyrick 222; Newton Dunn 18). Grisold Hughes made two titled marriages. By her first husband, Edward Neville (d.1589), Lord Abergavenny, the son of her grandfather's former jousting companion (*DNB*, 250), she had no children. Shortly after his death, she married Francis Clifford, 4th Earl of Cumberland (1559-1641). A

drawing of the Clifford coat of arms impaling Hughes shows that the arms borne by the family of Grisold Hughes were similar to those of Hughes of Gwerclas, an ancient Welsh family descended from the royal house of Powys, given as "argent a lion rampant sable armed and langued gules" (*Armory; House of Clifford*). By Francis Clifford, Grisold Hughes had two daughters, Margaret and Frances, and two sons, George (who died young) and Henry (1592-1643), who succeeded his father as 5th Earl of Cumberland and married Frances Cecil (1593-1644), daughter of Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury. Henry Clifford died without male heirs and, under the terms of an entail, his lands passed to his redoubtable cousin, Lady Anne Clifford (1590-1676), the daughter of his uncle George Clifford (1558-1605), 3rd Earl of Cumberland (Banks 96; Cokayne 35; *Peerage*, 13).

Sir Griffith Don died in 1543, and was buried at Windsor, presumably alongside his father in the Collegiate Church at Windsor Castle (Newton Dunn 15-7). His only daughter, Elizabeth, had been "the last surviving member of the family to bear the name of Don", and McFarlane conjectures that for this reason the Don triptych remained in the family of her lineal descendant, the Duke of Devonshire, where for many years it hung above the altar in the chapel at the Duke's country home of Chatsworth in Derbyshire, prior to becoming the property of the National Gallery (54).

As indicated in the foregoing sketch of his career, Sir Griffith Don was closely connected with the court of Henry VIII throughout his life, and his granddaughter Grisold Hughes, whose own father appears to have been a member of an ancient Welsh family, married into two wealthy and titled Elizabethan families. It is also of interest that Elizabeth Don (d.1590), her husband Thomas Hughes (d.1587), and their four children were contemporaries of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, and must have been personally known to him.

Issue # 48 of the *Edward De Vere Newsletter* will deal with the life of Sir John Don's second daughter, Margaret.

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DESCENDANTS AND FAMILY CONNECTIONS OF SIR GRIFFITH DON

