

**Stained Glass at
Stoneleigh Abbey,
Warwickshire**

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- **A consideration of its significance for the Leigh family**

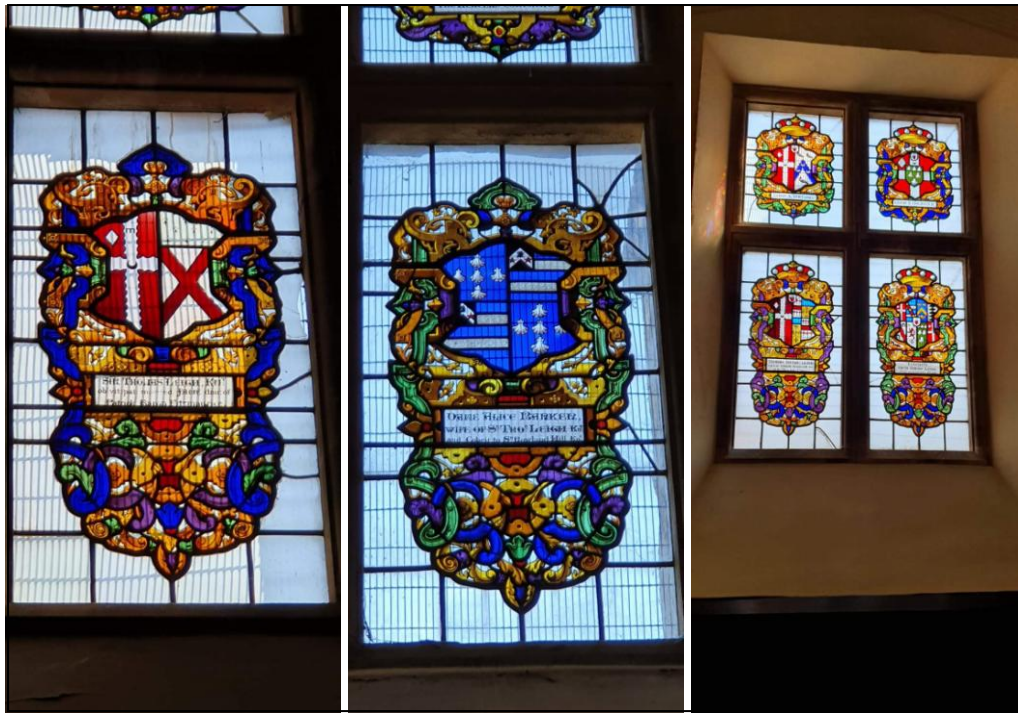
Stained Glass at Stoneleigh Abbey, Warwickshire

The stained glass we see in churches was often a way of illustrating Bible stories; sometimes it commemorates the dead. In the great country houses, however, it is frequently heraldic, revealing the family pedigree in time-honoured coded form. At Stoneleigh Abbey several areas of the building present significant and unusual examples of this last, dating from medieval through Tudor times, to the early nineteenth century. This paper examines, in particular, glass known as “The Brereton Glass” and considers its relevance to the Warwickshire Leigh family.

Before considering the Brereton Glass, it is to be noted that in the Long Gallery, which was created from the footprint of the former abbey’s cloister, are four windows, grouped in pairs, which are medieval in date and ecclesiastical in subject. Elsewhere in the Gallery, however, can be seen two discrete groups: first, in the porch entrance to the Gallery, is glass by Thomas Willement from the late 1830s, portraying the coats of arms of the English monarchy, and within the Gallery itself the coats of arms of the Leigh family, showing all their many marriages from earliest times – an ancestral history in glass.



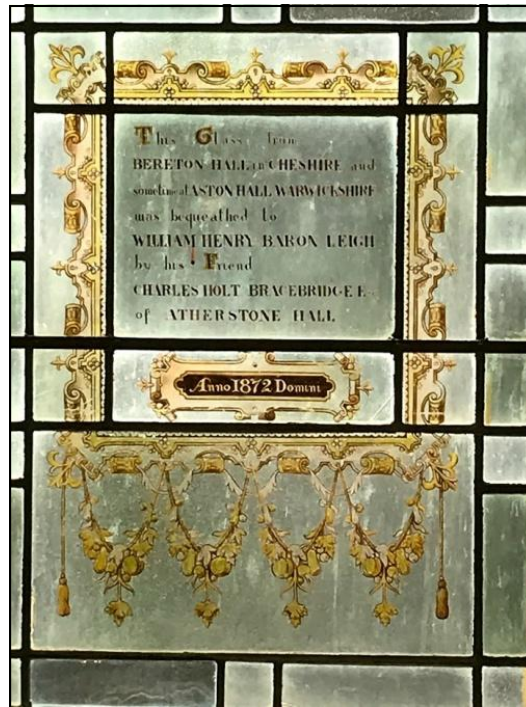
Examples of the Willement glass showing various Royal coats of arms



Examples of the Leigh family's coats of arms – Sir Thomas Leigh, his wife Dame Alice Barker, and a set of four with baronial crests

The second group in the Gallery – and the main focus of this paper - dates from Tudor times. Consisting of nine individual windows, this glass was originally positioned as one complete, large window at Brereton Hall in Cheshire. It was later moved to Aston Hall by Sir Lister Holte but was gifted to the Leighs of Stoneleigh in the nineteenth century.¹ This group needs to be considered alongside another In the Gilt Hall, where there can be seen in the South wall a magnificent stained glass window, filled with thirty-two coats of arms. Most of the glass in this window dates from the sixteenth century. Visitors are not only dazzled by its colours and detail, but also intrigued by the wording in a panel at the base: it declares that the window was a gift in 1872 from Charles Holte Bracebridge of Atherstone Hall, in Warwickshire to Lord Leigh, having come from Brereton Hall in Cheshire by way of Aston Hall. Why would this window, together with the nine in the Long Gallery, be transferred from one stately home to another?

¹ In 1817 the glass was moved again, to the library of Atherstone Hall.



The inscribed pane of glass in the Gilt Hall. Note the mis-spelling of Brereton

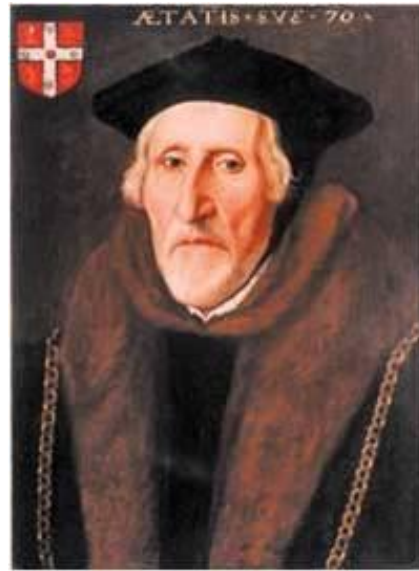
One needs first to ask why the glass was likely to have been welcomed by the Leighs. The answer lies in a complex web of ancient family histories, revealing close associations among some of the most influential families in the country.²

In 1872 William Henry, 2nd Baron Leigh of the Second Creation, was well established at Stoneleigh in Warwickshire, but could trace his ancestry via Gloucestershire, Staffordshire and Cheshire – and many other counties too. His father, Chandos, had been created 1st Baron Leigh in 1839, the title having been revived fifty years after the death in 1786 of Edward, the 5th Lord Leigh of Stoneleigh, who had died childless. When Edward's sister, Mary, also childless, died in 1806, the Warwickshire estates passed to cousins from Gloucestershire. However, both branches of the family could trace a common ancestry from a former Lord Mayor of London, Sir Thomas Leigh, who had bought the dissolved Cistercian abbey at Stoneleigh in 1561 and made it into his Warwickshire country home; two of his sons inherited, respectively, lands in Gloucestershire and Warwickshire. William Henry, like his father Chandos, was descended from the Gloucestershire line.

² For a detailed examination of the heraldry itself, see Bostock, Tony *An Interpretation of the Heraldry at Brereton Hall* www.tonybostock.com June 2019



William Henry, 2nd Lord Leigh, and his wife Caroline Amelia



Sir Thomas Leigh, Lord Mayor of London

Owing to these circumstances it is likely that William Henry was interested in his ancestral lineage – and keen to emphasise its legitimacy. His father and grandfather had been much troubled by a bitter and protracted legal case which had challenged their right, as Gloucestershire men, to the Warwickshire estates. Claimants had come from the north-west of England – specifically from Lancashire and Cheshire - who purported to have a stronger right to the land, and the title. Although it was clearly revealed that they had a spurious claim, it was undeniable that there were distant Legh/Leigh “cousins” from that part of the country. Sir Thomas Leigh, who established his family at Stoneleigh Abbey in 1561, was himself descended –at least by tradition - from key players in medieval English history.

Sir Thomas could look, for example, back to 1399, after the upheavals caused by the deposing of King Richard II and the ascent to the throne of Henry Bolingbroke as King Henry IV, and see that his supposed ancestor Sir Piers Legh was beheaded as an adherent of Richard II. He had fought bravely at Crecy on behalf of Edward III and had been the Black Prince's standard bearer.

Sir Piers’ son, another Sir Piers Legh, fought for King Henry V and was wounded at Agincourt in 1415. These members of the Legh family came from Lyme in Cheshire, and an old stained glass window remains in the drawing room of Lyme Hall portraying Sir Piers and the devoted mastiff who stayed with him until rescued from the battlefield. Sir Piers was injured again in action at the Siege of Meaux in 1422 and died as a result of his wounds in Paris. He was

buried at St Michael's Church, Macclesfield in the Legh Chapel, which had been built to receive his body. A memorial tablet (with a factually inaccurate final line!) was placed there in 1649 which reads:

*Here lyeth the bodie of Perkins Legh
That for King Richard the death did die
Betrayed for righteousness
And the bones of Sir Peers his sonne
That with King Henry the fifth did wonne
In Paris
This Perkin served King Edward the third and the Black Prince
His sunne in all their warres in France and was at the battle
Of Cressie and had Lyme given him forever for his service
And after their deaths served King Richard the second
And left him not in his troubles but was taken with him
And beheaded at Chester by King Henry the fourth
The said Sir Piers his sonne served King Henrie the fifth
And was slain at the battle of Agincourt.³*

Sir Thomas Leigh of Stoneleigh Abbey, who died in 1571, would not, of course, have seen this memorial, but may well have considered these to be his ancestors. He was brought up in Wellington, Shropshire, not far away from Chester. He had received his knighthood from Queen Elizabeth I on the occasion of her accession to the throne. Perhaps the seventeenth-century Macclesfield inscription reveals something about the way in which families like the Leghs/Leighs were loyal servants of the crown. In 1649 the Cheshire Legh who memorialised his ancestors was doing so in the very year that King Charles I was beheaded. Was he noting the royalist devotion of his ancestors, or

³ Ormerod G. *A History of the County Palatine and City of Chester* 1810, and Matthew Hyde *St. Michael's & All Angels, Macclesfield*, 2010

alluding to a time when kings could demand loyalty which only ended in death?

What, then, of the Stoneleigh windows, full of knights and their heraldic devices? What relevance might they hold for the Leigh family in Tudor times, and what for William Henry and his family in Victorian ones?

The Brereton Glass in the Long Gallery

William Henry, 2nd Baron Leigh of the Second Creation, could read via the heraldic glass bequeathed to him by Charles Holte Bracebridge, some of the history of his own family, and perhaps importantly for him, his *Warwickshire* ancestry, descended from *Cheshire* roots.

First, one needs to see that the glass originated in Cheshire – or at least, even if it had been made elsewhere, that is where it was first installed. Brereton Hall, described by the sixteenth century antiquary William Camden as “magnificent and sumptuous”, once contained windows “emblazoned with 330 coats of arms, representing the English nobility and Cheshire gentry”⁴; it still contains extraordinary friezes of heraldic devices in its plasterwork, commissioned by Sir William Brereton in the late sixteenth century. Naturally enough it includes the coats of arms of branches of the Brereton family itself, but also a great many belonging to English aristocracy as well as to the royal families of Europe.⁵

It is appropriate therefore that the glass now in the Long Gallery at Stoneleigh comes from that part of the country and depicts the ancient earls of Chester; as we have seen, the Leighs’ ancestry may have been linked to the Leghs of Lyme in Cheshire.

There are nine earls, now depicted in nine separate windows rather than in one great window: firstly, Leofric and Leofwine, who were actually Saxon earls of *Mercia*. Both men were thus inevitably associated with Warwickshire – Leofric, in particular, with Coventry - and there would perhaps be a happy perceived connection in historical terms with Stoneleigh’s monastic foundation in the mid-twelfth century. It has been suggested that their inclusion was designed to bring the total number of earls to nine, in order to draw a parallel

⁴ Bostock, Tony, *Op cit*

⁵ See Appendix 1

with the Nine Worthies, a collection of heroes from history and legend that included Alexander the Great and King Arthur.⁶



Leofric, Earl of Mercia, d.1057



Leofwine, Earl of Mercia d. 1028

The seven Chester earls, in order of descent, are Hugh d'Avranches (nicknamed Lupus), Richard, his son; Randolph de Meschines; Randolph de Gernons ; Hugh Kevelioc; Randolph Blundeville and John Scot. After the death of this seventh earl in 1238, the eldest sons of all English monarchs were given the title of Earl of Chester, as well as being named Prince of Wales. As stated earlier, each earl is now housed separately within a window high in the walls of the Long Gallery (they were originally combined in one large window at Brereton); each is shown brandishing a sword and wearing a coronet and a surcoat carrying his coat of arms.

⁶ 'Magnificent and Sumptuous': the Glazing of Brereton Hall, Cheshire – article by Dr Penny Hebgin-Barnes featured in www.vidimus.org Issue 103



Hugh d'Avranches (Lupus),
1st Earl, cousin of the Conqueror



Richard, 2nd Earl, drowned returning
to Normandy in 1120



Randolph de Meschines, 3rd Earl



Randolph de Gernons, 4th Earl



Hugh Kevelioc, 5th Earl



Randolph Blundevill, 6th Earl



John Scot, 7th Earl

An additional point of interest for William Henry, the nineteenth century recipient of this glass, is that his wife, Caroline Amelia, was a daughter of the prominent Cheshire family, the Grosvenors of Eaton Hall, who were descended from a brother of Hugh Lupus. In fact, Caroline's brother, who became the 1st Duke of Westminster, was named Hugh Lupus Grosvenor!

Thus both William Henry and his wife could feel that the Brereton Glass which they placed in the Long Gallery revealed their ancient ancestry. Clearly, they were proud of their connections to the Earls of Chester, and the local connections with the Earls of Mercia.

The Brereton Glass in the Gilt Hall

What of the Gilt Hall window and its dedication? An investigation into Leigh family history reveals surprising connections with the families whose grand houses are named there. As we have seen, the donor of the window is recorded as Charles Holte Bracebridge of Atherstone Hall, who died in 1872. Charles' mother was Mary Elizabeth Holte, (1757-1819) whose father had been the 6th Baronet Holte of Aston Hall in Birmingham (1721-1782). What was the connection between Brereton, Aston and Atherstone Halls...and with Stoneleigh Abbey?

Aston Hall had fallen into decline following the death of Mary's father, and Mary had merely retained some portraits and other family heirlooms after the contents of Aston were sold at auction in 1817. To compound the difficulties, Mary's husband, Abraham Bracebridge of Atherstone, lost his fortune in industrial speculation, and Mary had to sell her reversionary interest in Aston Hall (which had passed to the Legge family) to settle her husband's debts. Aston Hall was left empty and in 1818 was sold, and tenanted for the next thirty years by James Watt, the son of the great engineer. During this time he entertained the young Princess Victoria, who was to return, famously, in 1858 – of which more, later. Watt died in 1848 and Aston Hall's fate altered forever.

What had Aston Hall to do with Stoneleigh Abbey? In fact, the two houses have links originating in the seventeenth century. After the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603 and the accession of King James I, wealthy and well-connected families saw a chance to increase their standing still further: many bought knighthoods for £100. In 1611 the king created an hereditary honour to be conferred on just two hundred recipients – a baronetcy. Only men with lands worth at least £1,000 a year were eligible, and the price was £1,095, which was seen as a contribution to the king's army in Ulster. Sir Thomas Holte of Aston purchased his baronetcy in November 1611; only three other Warwickshire knights bought baronetcies in the same year – Sir L'Estrange Mordaunt of Walton, Sir Edward Devereux of Castle Bromwich... and Sir Thomas Leigh of Stoneleigh, son of our first Sir Thomas.

We should then fast forward thirty years to August 1642, at the beginning of the Civil War, when King Charles I arrived at Coventry with an army. Finding the gates of this parliamentary stronghold closed against him, he travelled to nearby Stoneleigh Abbey, where another Thomas Leigh, the grandson of Sir Thomas Leigh, 1st Baronet, provided hospitality. The king remained at

Stoneleigh for three days, and rewarded his host with a barony, thus beginning the line of Lords Leigh which remains to this day.



Thomas, 1st Baron Leigh of Stoneleigh

Warwickshire had been deeply divided during the Civil War, but records show that Sir Thomas Holte of Aston Hall waited on the king that August at Stoneleigh. The king then stayed at Aston Hall itself in October that year, before the Battle of Edgehill. After the Civil War both Sir Thomases – Holte and Leigh - had to find enormous sums of money in fines for their loyal support of the king. We can therefore see political connections between the two owners of Stoneleigh Abbey and Aston Hall.

For many years Sir Thomas Holte had been in dispute with his elder son and heir, whom he wished to disinherit in favour of his younger son. When, in 1641, the younger son died, Sir Thomas decided to marry again (his first wife had died after giving birth to fifteen children). His new wife was Anne Littleton, forty years his junior. Her name will reappear later in our story.

In fact, the elder son was subsequently killed at Edgehill in October 1642, and the baronetcy was to pass to his son Sir Robert Holte, Sir Thomas's grandson.

At this point, in mid seventeenth century, we begin to see more intersections between the families who were to become associated with the stained glass now at Stoneleigh. In 1647 Sir Thomas Holte, knowing that his grandson Robert was now his heir, arranged for him to marry Jane Brereton, the sister of William, Lord Brereton, whose house, Brereton Hall in Cheshire, had been a royalist garrison during the war. Their son Charles – Jane died giving birth to him in 1649 – was brought up at Brereton Hall, the place where the stained glass had been commissioned by his uncle, Sir William.



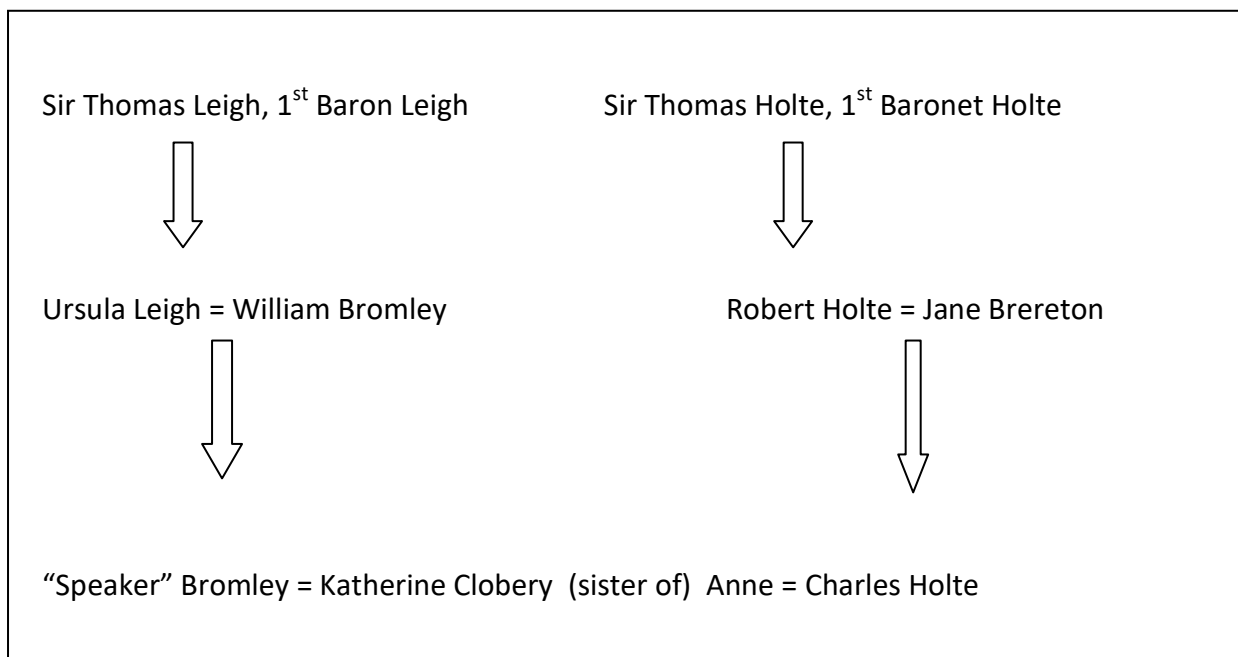
Aston Hall



Brereton Hall

The names of Holte and Brereton were thus joined, as were the properties associated with them – Aston Hall and Brereton. Where do the Leighs come in, here?

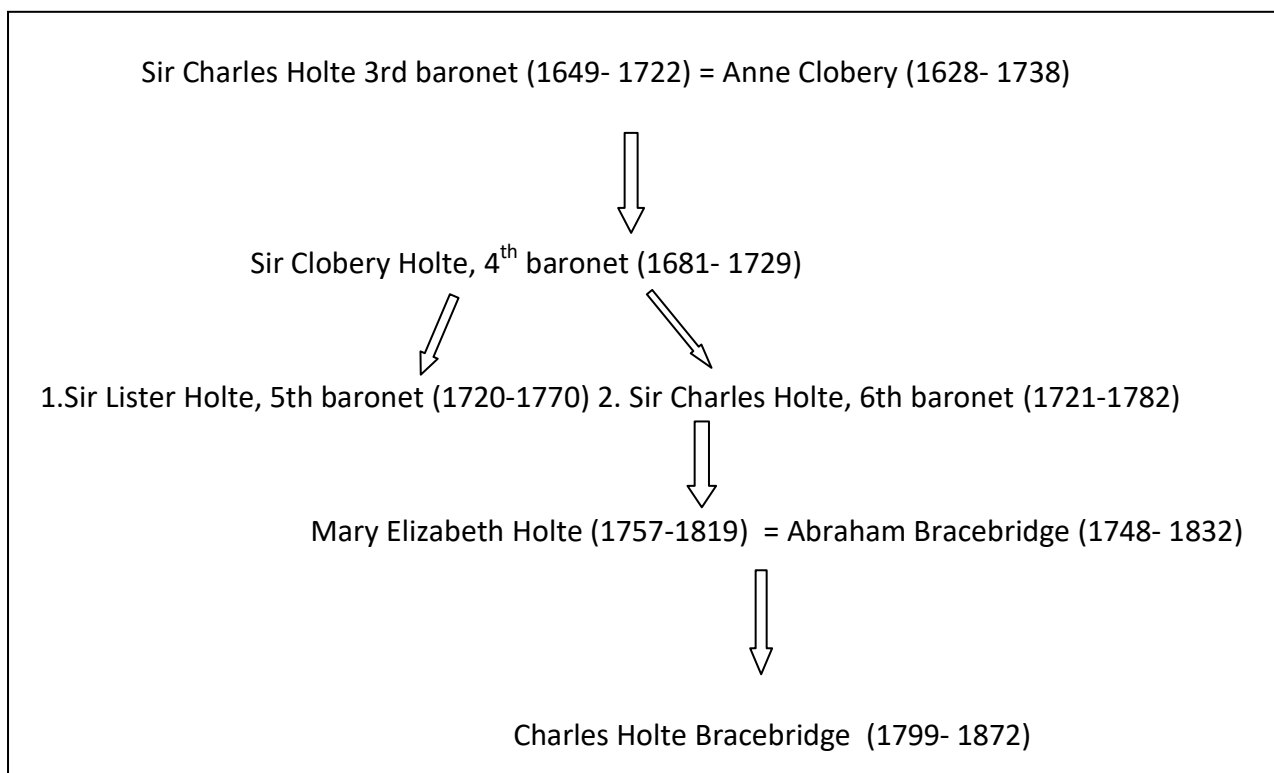
Thomas, 1st Baron Leigh Leigh of Stoneleigh, had married Mary Egerton, granddaughter of Elizabeth Brereton, sister of Sir William Brereton. The couple had eight children. One of their daughters, Ursula, married William Bromley of Baginton Hall. Their son, also called William, became known as “Speaker Bromley” as Speaker of the House of Commons, and he married Katherine Clobery. Katherine’s older sister, Anne, was to marry Sir Charles Holte of Aston and Brereton. A complicated connection! Put more simply, and shown in the chart below, the Clobery sisters married men whose ancestors were Sir Thomas Leigh and Sir Thomas Holte, and so we see a family link between the Leigh family with the Holtes and Breretons.



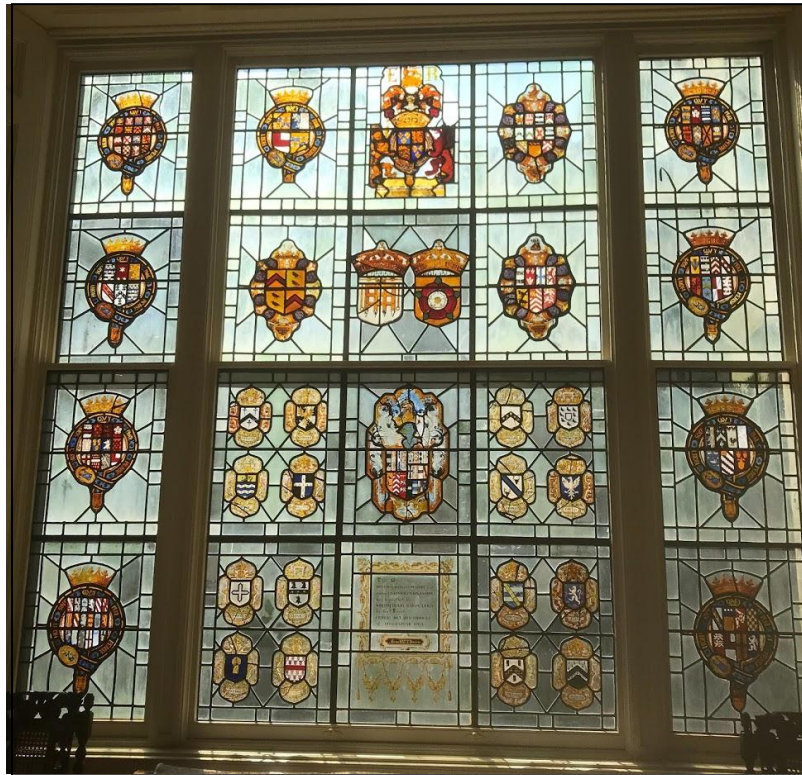
It didn’t stop there: Anne Littleton, the aforementioned second wife of Sir Thomas Holte, was the source of yet another connection between these

families. After naming his grandson Robert his heir, Sir Thomas Holte himself died in 1654, leaving his much-younger wife a widow. She remarried...and her second husband was Charles Leigh, third son of Thomas 1st Baron Leigh, and brother of Ursula Leigh. Their only daughter, Alicia, is buried in the family vault in the church of St Mary the Virgin, Stoneleigh. The Holte/Leigh bond was strong.

As we move into the eighteenth century both Brereton Hall and Aston Hall had much less settled dynastic fortunes than Stoneleigh Abbey. Sir Charles Holte's grandson, the fifth baronet, Sir Lister Holte, married three times but had no children, and so his brother Charles became sixth baronet. Charles had no male heir, and as we have seen before, it was his daughter, Mary Elizabeth Holte, who married Abraham Bracebridge of Atherstone Hall. We arrive – after a labyrinthine survey of intermarried “county” families – at the Brereton windows again.



It is possible then that in making a gift to Lord Leigh, acknowledgement was being made of the close ancestral relationships between the Leighs and those depicted in the glass – first, via the “nine earls”, their descent from the earls of Chester and secondly, via the window now in the Gilt Hall , their ancestral connections to other important families.



The Gilt Hall window, containing thirty-two heraldic panels, is dominated by the Royal Arms of Queen Elizabeth I. Beneath it are two badges – the Tudor rose and the Beaufort portcullis. Below these are the achievements of Sir William Brereton, for whom the glass was designed at Brereton in the 1580s.



The Royal Arms of Queen Elizabeth I



The arms of Sir William Brereton and his wife Margaret Savage

A second Brereton achievement of arms appears to the right of the royal badges; to their left are the arms of the Earl of Stafford. To the right of the Royal Arms are the arms of Henry Compton, High Sheriff of Warwickshire in 1571 (would he therefore have been known to Stoneleigh's Sir Thomas Leigh?).

Also included in the window are the arms of nine Knights of the Garter, each with the motto *Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense*. Starting from bottom left of the window, all are well-known to history – first, Howard of Effingham, commander of the English forces during the battle against the Spanish Armada – the man who arranged the death warrant of Mary Queen of Scots, and one of whose descendants was related to the Leigh family via Robert Dudley. Above this, Walter Devereux, the father of Elizabeth I's favourite, Robert 2nd earl of Essex. Then, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and above his arms, those of Edward Manners, 3rd earl of Rutland.

Moving to the right, just left of the Royal Arms, are the arms of William Somerset, 3rd earl of Worcester, and in the top right corner of the window are the arms of Sir Henry Sidney. Moving down the right side of the window are, then, William Herbert, 2nd earl of Pembroke's arms, followed by those of his close friend Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, and finally those of Henry Stanley, 4th earl of Derby. Several are connected, as it happens, if only tenuously to the Leigh family of the sixteenth century. Most obvious of these is Sir Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester, Queen Elizabeth's favourite. His son Robert married Alice Leigh in 1596 and to this day members of the Leigh family carry "Dudley" as one of their Christian names. Henry Stanley's son Ferdinando married Alice Spenser, whose sister Katherine married Thomas, 1st baronet of Stoneleigh – the man who, it could be argued, connects all three of the great houses of Aston, Stoneleigh and Brereton.

Finally there are four blocks of four sets of arms, representing Cheshire families. All but two of them carry the date 1577, and about half have direct links to the Brereton family. One of them is for the Bracebridge family, and is dated 1826; it will have been a replacement, inserted for the Atherstone Hall family.⁷

⁷ Bostock, Tony, *op cit*



The block of four on the bottom left of the window. The Grosvenor “wheatsheaf” is clearly seen, and echoes the emblem used in the image of Hugh Kevelioc, one of the nine earls.

The initial reason for Sir William Brereton commissioning this heraldic glass, which is just a small portion of the armorial devices which can be found all over Brereton itself today, is unknown. He was evidently celebrating the Tudor elite in the large window; the Leghs of Adlington in Cheshire did something similar, as did Sir Piers Leigh of Lyme. In all probability he was expressing a commitment to Queen Elizabeth at a time when plots against her abounded.

Conclusion

Just fourteen years before the bequest of the glass was made, in 1858, the Leighs had been host to another monarch – Queen Victoria herself. Her three days’ stay at Stoneleigh is widely recognised as one of the high points in Leigh family history, and the reason for her stay was, as it happens, connecting the two properties of the Leigh and Holte families. William Henry, as Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire, provided his monarch with hospitality, but in doing so was overseeing a new chapter in the history of Aston Hall itself.



Queen Victoria and Prince Albert arrive at Stoneleigh Abbey in June 1858

After the sale of Aston Hall in 1818, the gardens and extensive parkland had been subject to a variety of uses. The principal tenant for so many years, James Watt, had made enormous improvements, but after his death in 1848 there was a great auction of the house's contents, and consideration was given to what was to be done with the park. Ultimately "The Aston Hall and Park Company" aimed to buy the lot, hoping to do so by subscription. They persuaded Queen Victoria and Prince Albert to open it in June 1858, as a "People's Park." Charles Holte Bracebridge lent Holte family silver for the occasion, and the royal visit, supervised by Lord Leigh, was a great success throughout their stay in Warwickshire.



The Queen arrives at Aston Hall *Illustrated London News*

There is no doubt that in receiving the Brereton Glass from Charles Holte Bracebridge in 1872, the Leighs of Stoneleigh would be able to reflect on their friendship and inter-marriages with a local family, the Holtes of Aston Hall, whose story at the time of the English Civil War was so similar to their own, and whose allegiance to the Royal family never faltered. They would be able to consider their descent from early Cheshire families, too, not least via the Brereton family in the seventeenth century. In playing host to Victoria and Albert they could demonstrate allegiance to their own monarch, just as their illustrious forebears had given loyal service to many kings and queens in the past.

In addition, the family's interest in their own lineage – in particular, the ennoblement of the Warwickshire branch – reveals itself in the commissioning of the Willement glass in the early nineteenth century. From the knighting of Sir Thomas Leigh in 1559 through his descendants' becoming baronets and barons until the title became extinct in 1789 with the death of the 3rd Lord Leigh, they were keen to stress their ancient pedigree. When the Gloucestershire branch of the family succeeded to the Warwickshire estates in 1806 they were merely country gentlemen, but by 1839 had received from Queen Victoria the revival of the peerage. When, in that year, Chandos Leigh became 1st Baron Leigh of the Second Creation, the family could reflect on

many centuries of aristocratic heritage. The Willement glass in the Long Gallery celebrates their past; in similar vein, heraldic glass was commissioned for the new mausoleum being built in the 1820s in nearby Stoneleigh Church, where it fills both east and west windows. The Leighs were, by now, the largest landowners in the county, and could be justly proud of their own ancestry as well as their ancient connections with other important families.

With sincere thanks to Tony Bostock for his advice during the preparation of this paper. Some of its discoveries are now leading to further research by him into the Legh/Leigh arms, specifically comparing the framed parchment with heraldry at Adlington (see appendix 1). Many thanks, too, to David P Eaves of Stoneleigh Abbey for allowing access to the building and for supporting this research.

Sheila Woolf, January 2021

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- 'Magnificent and Sumptuous': the Glazing of Brereton Hall, Cheshire – article by Dr Penny Hebgin-Barnes featured in www.vidimus.org Issue 103

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Pages 22,23,24 – the author

Pages 6,11, - courtesy of Stoneleigh Abbey Trust

Pages 17,18 – Illustrated London News, June 1858

Appendix 1

A missing book and a framed parchment

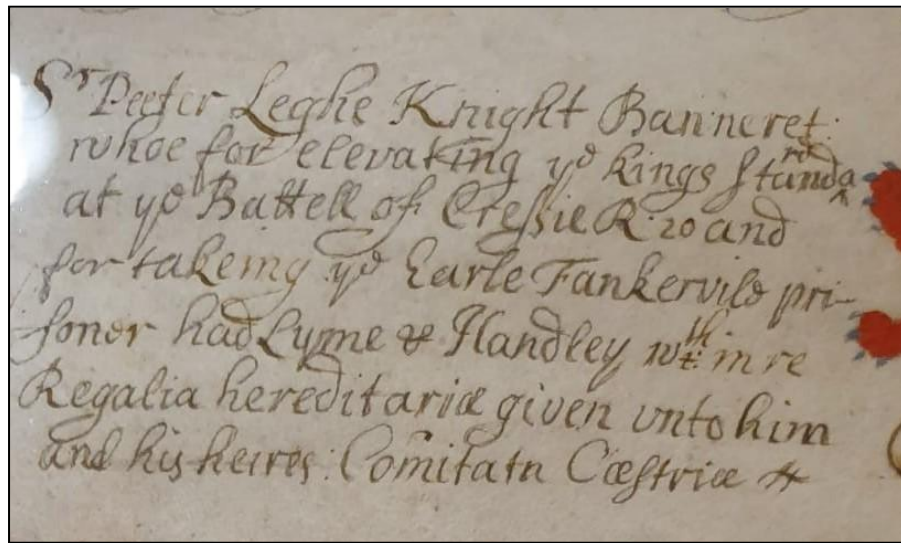
This investigation was inspired by the receipt of Tony Bostock's paper on the heraldry at Brereton Hall, and I am much indebted to his research for prompting me to discover the possible reasons for the Leigh family's interest in the stained glass which came their way. His research gives considerably more detailed information about the heraldry, and is beyond the scope of this paper.

There remains a great deal of evidence at Stoneleigh Abbey to show that for the Leighs genealogy was a preoccupation. Perhaps this was so in many similar families – it was certainly fashionable in Elizabethan and Jacobean times and as stated was a way of illustrating the family's status and identity. In the Chapel Corridor, for example, hangs a framed parchment illustration of more than fifty heraldic devices, applicable to various members of the Leigh family.⁸



⁸ The parchment has much in common with a canopy at Adlington Hall in Cheshire. In sharing this information with Tony Bostock he has been prompted to investigate the comparison in a forthcoming article.

Many are accompanied by a pencilled description of the person whose arms are illustrated. At the top, in the centre, is given a biography of Sir Piers Legh/Leigh (see page 7).



"Sir Peter Legh Knight Banner...for elevating the kings standard at the battle of Crecy and for taking the earl of Tankerville prisoner had Lyme & Handley with "regalia hereditaria" given unto him and his heirs: earl of Chester" (not entirely accurate historically!)

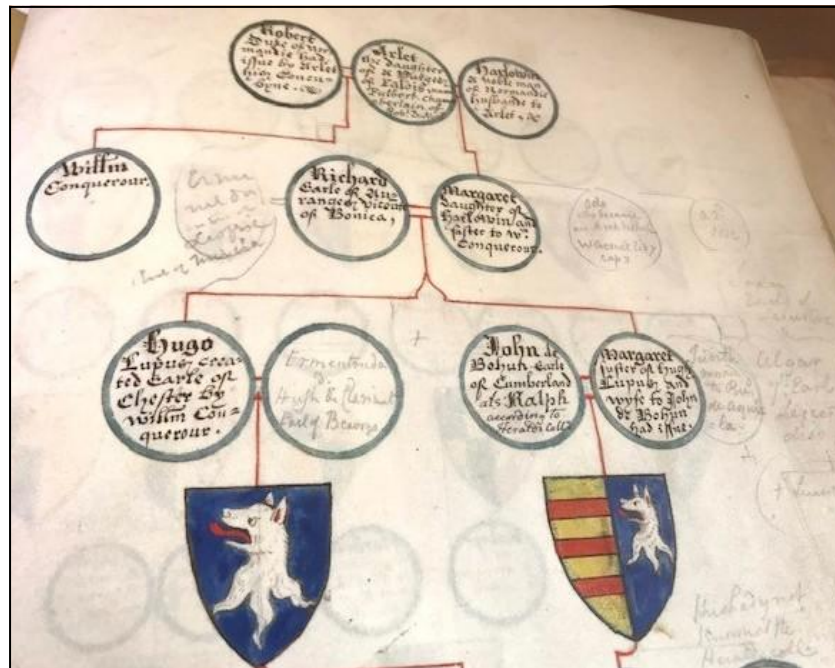
Whilst conducting my research, however, I noted a paragraph from Tony Bostock's article on Brereton Hall:

It is said that at one time the windows were emblazoned with 330 coats of arms, representing the English nobility and Cheshire gentry, many of which were to be seen in the windows of the apartments on the first floor but these no longer remain. This equivalent of an extensive roll of arms was recorded by the Somerset Herald in a parchment book which was signed by Sir William Brereton in 1608. The whereabouts of this book is now not known, but in 1854 it was seen by Alfred Davidson, the author of a book about the Holtes of Aston Hall, Birmingham.⁹
(my underscore)

Extraordinarily, during my visit to Stoneleigh, the manager, David Eaves, remarked that there was an old book in a cupboard which contained many such heraldic devices. When the book was found and opened, it seemed clear to me that it is the "lost" book described by Bostock. It is

⁹ Bostock, op cit

full of European and English coats of arms, equating to those illustrated in Bostock's article, and also contains a variety of genealogical tables relating to the early family of the Earls of Chester, depicted in the "nine earls" windows. Within roundels for each person is a short biography, and there are later, pencilled additions similar to those in the framed parchment hanging at Stoneleigh.



Burie & sonne
 This Richard earle of Chester and his
 brother Oruell were drowned at Goodwin
 sandes comming from Normandie with the
 Children of Kinge Henry the firste. 1120.



Examples of the genealogical tables, with short biographical descriptions



An example of one of the coats of arms

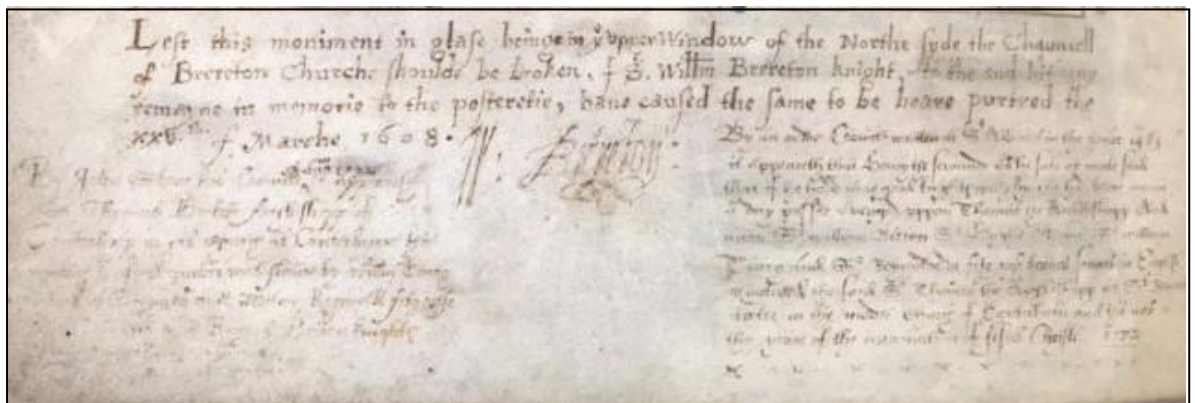
These are undoubtedly significant in their own right. However, perhaps more exciting still, is that there is a magnificent full-page illustration of a window which was once at St Oswald's Church at Brereton. The window commemorates the martyrdom of St Thomas a Becket, with the saint himself in the centre flanked by his murderers. On the left are William de Tracy and Reginald Fitzurse and on the right, Hugh de Morville and Richard Brito (le Breton).



This is a copy of the window which once existed in the church; it is pictured in *Broken Idols of the English Reformation* by Margaret Aston, published by Cambridge University Press in 2015, which references *Archaeologia*, 9 (1869): Society of Antiquaries of London.

Anticipation that the image might well be broken was evidently justified, since beneath the illustration is an inscription signed by Sir William Brereton and dated 1608. It is of considerable interest, since it clearly foresees that the window – and perhaps other imagery within the

church - might be destroyed. Sadly, Sir William's fears were not unfounded, as the window no longer exists.



Transcription (where legible):

Lest this monument in glase being in the upper window of the north side of the chancel of Brereton Church should be broken Sir William Brereton knight to this end it may remain in memory for posterity has caused the same to be here portrayed the 25th March 1608

The year is perhaps significant: by 1608, following the Gunpowder Plot of 5 November 1605, the national psyche had begun to reject all imagery associated with the "old religion", even more fervently than in the early years of Elizabeth I's reign. The cult of St Thomas a Becket, so strong for 500 years, was being firmly eradicated.

It is probable, therefore, that this book accompanied the gift of the Brereton Glass to Lord Leigh in 1872. It is a precious find, being perhaps the only existing coloured copy of the window.

Appendix 2

A Jane Austen connection?

The novelist Jane Austen could, like William Henry Lord Leigh, trace her ancestry back to Sir Piers Leigh of Cheshire. Jane's mother Cassandra was a Leigh before she married, and on a visit to Stoneleigh Abbey in 1806 wrote a memorable account of the mansion and its grounds. Cassandra's cousin Mary – whose husband the Reverend Thomas Leigh inherited Stoneleigh in 1806 - had earlier written an extensive history of the family, giving biographical details of all the principal members since medieval times; it is highly probable that Jane Austen knew it and had read it.¹⁰

Did Jane see the framed parchment hanging at Stoneleigh, showing all the early heraldic devices of her maternal family? As she was shown around the house, now in the ownership of the Gloucestershire Leighs, was she interested in the many portraits of her Tudor and Jacobean forebears? Perhaps she was amused by the emphasis on their social elevation by a string of past monarchs. This speculation might be borne out by a section from the first chapter of *Persuasion*, written after her visit to Warwickshire and with echoes of her own family's story in the characterisations.¹¹ It is interesting to note the reference to Cheshire and to Dugdale, the great Warwickshire antiquarian, who certainly wrote about Stoneleigh.

¹⁰ *History of the Leigh Family* – Mary Leigh, Shakespeare Birthplace trust DR 18/31/884a

¹¹ *The Story of Elizabeth Wentworth, or "Aunt Betty"* – Jane Austen's Anne Elliot? Sheila Woolf 2018

Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were roused into admiration and respect, by contemplating the limited remnant of the earliest patents; there any unwelcome sensations, arising from domestic affairs changed naturally into pity and contempt as he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century; and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read his own history with an interest which never failed. This was the page at which the favourite volume always opened:

"ELLIOT OF KELLYNCH HALL.

"Walter Elliot, born March 1, 1760, married, July 15, 1784, Elizabeth, daughter of James Stevenson, Esq. of South Park, in the county of Gloucester, by which lady (who died 1800) he has issue Elizabeth, born June 1, 1785; Anne, born August 9, 1787; a still-born son, November 5, 1789; Mary, born November 20, 1791."

Precisely such had the paragraph originally stood from the printer's hands; but Sir Walter had improved it by adding, for the information of himself and his family, these words, after the date of Mary's birth—"Married, December 16, 1810, Charles, son and heir of Charles Musgrove, Esq. of Uppercross, in the county of Somerset," and by inserting most accurately the day of the month on which he had lost his wife.

Then followed the history and rise of the ancient and respectable family, in the usual terms; how it had been first settled in Cheshire; how mentioned in Dugdale, serving the office of high sheriff, representing a borough in three successive parliaments, exertions of loyalty, and dignity of baronet, in the first year of Charles II, with all the Marys and Elizabeths they had married; forming altogether two handsome duodecimo pages, and concluding with the arms and motto:—"Principal seat, Kellynch Hall, in the county of Somerset," and Sir Walter's handwriting again in this finale:—

"Heir presumptive, William Walter Elliot, Esq., great grandson of the second Sir Walter."

...and so on...

If only she had seen the Brereton and Willement glass!

