

## Addison House and the Calves Head Club...



*Addison House on Sand Street*

As a sympathiser for the past Royalist cause and subsequent beheading of an English King, the secret history surrounding Addison House both horrifies and intrigues me. Nothing about this old and fine looking building betrays its links to Oliver Cromwell's family or the 'bloody' secret society formed after his death, and during the later Restoration.

The photograph above, shows Addison House as it is today. Back in the 17th Century it belonged to Robert D'Aye and his wife Mary (nee Russell), the great granddaughter of Oliver Cromwell.

The earliest building shown in the same location on a map dated 1656, was under the ownership of Samuel Thornton Esq. The most successful family, apart from the Bestneys and their heirs of the Barnes family who achieved manorial standing were the Thorntons. They were descended from William Thornton, who was from the 1410s to the 1430s bailiff, warrener, and briefly lessee on the Duchy manor. From the late 15th century they built up over six or seven generations, the largest non-manorial holding in the parish. The Thornton family still acted as patrons of the villagers in the 1620s.



*Charles 1*

Samuel Thornton in 1646-7 was compounded from Soham as a Royalist for land worth c. £3330, in 1656 he owned 44 acres of closes and 212 acres of fieldland.

The Soham towns-folks opposition to the fen inclosures, authorised for Charles I, did not result in any widespread hostility to his ecclesiastical innovations. The vigorously Royalist, Roger Heckstetter, vicar from 1631, introduced such 'ceremonies' as the cross in baptism, and insisted on giving communion at the rails. He published the Kings Book of Sports and did not reprove villagers who played and drank in alehouses on Sundays. A few local Puritans objected, one c.1640 going elsewhere to hear afternoon sermons since Heckstetter preached only once, but most villagers apparently supported their vicar. Soon after Heckstetter had to leave Soham, where his communion rails were pulled down. He was officially sequestered in 1644, on charges laid by ten Puritan villagers.

During the anti-Puritan reaction of mid 1647, numerous villagers combined in July and August, with Samuel Thornton among their sixteen leaders, to expel from the pulpit and vicarage house a new 'godly' minister, and re-instated Heckstetter and the Prayer Book liturgy. They intimidated the local J.P.s, and soldiers from the Isle of Ely garrison had to be called on to repress the disorders. The living was recorded as being vacant in 1650, and some years later the villagers asked that their acting minister John Giles who was previously clerk to the vicarage, and had obtained episcopal ordination c.1655, be continued, and in 1655 Oliver Cromwell appointed John Giles to the Vicarage of Soham.

In c.1655 Samuel Thornton sold nearly all his estate in Soham to Sir Thomas Chicheley, why he did this is not certain, perhaps because he was heavily fined by Parliament for his royalist allegiance. Who lived in the house following this is not certain as the deeds to the property only start in the 1720's with the D'Ayes occupation.

The house was thought originally to be a wattle and daub single storey long house with a thatched roof, then later in the 17th century another storey was added, and again being re-modelled between and 1770.



*Oliver Cromwell*

## The Secret of Addison House

Recent research has found that The Calves Head Club, a secret society, members or supporters were active in Soham as late as 1765. It is written that there was a tradition in Soham that, during the lifetime of Mrs Mary D'Aye, out of respect to the doings of Oliver Cromwell her Great Grandfather, on the anniversary of King Charles martyrdom, a 'calf's head' besmeared with blood was hoisted on a pole in front of the home of the husband, Robert D'Aye.

## The Calves Head Club

The Calves Head Club was formed shortly after the execution of Charles I, in 1649 following the English Civil War, where the antimonarchists members would hold a feast on the anniversary of the kings execution every January 30th. The following extract is from a book called The Secret History of the Calves Head Club, the first paragraph was printed in 1705 the second in 1713. 'By another gentleman, who, about eight years ago, went, out of mere curiosity, to their club, and has since furnished me with the following papers[the songs or anthems], I was informed that it was kept in no fixed house, but that they removed as they saw convenient; that the place they met in when he was with them was in a blind alley about Moor-fields; that the company wholly consisted of Independents and Anabaptists (I am glad, for the honour of the Presbyterians, to set down this remark); that the famous Jerry White, formerly chaplain to Oliver Cromwell (who, no doubt of it, came to sanctify with his pious exhortations the ribaldry of the day), said grace; that, after the cloth was removed, the anniversary anthem, as they impiously called it, was sung, and a calf's skull filled with wine, or other liquor, and then a brimmer, went round to the pious memory of those worthy patriots who had killed the tyrant, and delivered the country from his arbitrary sway. Where an axe was hung up in the clubroom, and was revered as a principal symbol in this diabolical sacrament. Their bill of fare was a large dish of calves'-heads, dressed several ways, by which they represented the king, and his friends who had suffered in his cause; a large pike with a small one in his mouth, as an emblem of tyranny; a large cod's head, by which they pretended to represent the person of the king singly; a boar's head, with an apple in its mouth, to represent the king. After the repast was over, one of their elders presented an 'Ikon Basilike', which was with great solemnity burned upon the table, whilst the anthems were singing. After this, another produced Milton's Defensio Populi Anglicani, upon which all laid their hands, and made a protestation, in form of an oath, for ever to stand by and maintain the same. The company wholly consisted of Ana-Baptists."

The Eikon Basilike was a purported spiritual autobiography attributed to King Charles I of England. It was published on February 9th, 1649, ten days after the King was beheaded by Parliament.

John Milton was one of the greatest poets of the English language and served as the secretary for foreign languages in Cromwell's government. The Calves Head Club was thought to have been founded by Milton. The following is the Calves Head Club Anthem for the 30th January 1690.

**Now let's sing, carouse, and roar,  
The happy day is come once more,  
For to revel, is but civil,  
As our Fathers did before,  
Who, when the tyrant would enslave us,  
Chopp'd his calves-head off to save us.**

**Let each youth his love forsake,  
And a merry bumper take,  
Let no Round-Head, here be grounded,  
And drink dry the French-Mans lake,  
Thus in clarret we caress us,  
Till old Puss awake and bless us.**

**Let the Prelates now go on,  
And rail afresh at forty one,  
The deposing, they're spousing,  
We the Father, they the son,  
Through the treason, they did find us,  
They, my friends, are not behind us.**

**Then let's laugh and revel here,  
And of our calves-head make good chear,  
This we dish up, and no Bishop  
Dines without one all the Year.  
Thus we prosper without fighting,  
In practice and in food uniting.**



*Calves Heads*

## An Imposing Grave

In the graveyard of St Andrews Church, Soham, is a tomb surrounded by iron railings just outside the north porch containing Mary and her husband Robert D'Aye. Mary was the daughter of William Russell Esquire of Fordham Abbey and Elizabeth Cromwell who was the daughter of Henry Cromwell, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and the son of Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector. Mary D'Aye died in November 1765 followed by her husband Robert in April 1770, also buried in the same tomb are Mary and Roberts daughter, grandson and great grandson.



*The tomb of Mary D'Aye & Family*

### **Mary's inscription reads as follows:**

Robert D'Aye Esq died April 1770

also Mary wife of Robert D'Aye Esq

(daughter of William Russell Esq of Fordham Abbey and Eliz his wife who was the only surviving daughter of Henry Cromwell Lord Lieutenant of Ireland son of Oliver Cromwell, died Nov 5 1765 aged 75 years.

As for Oliver Cromwell himself, he died after a bout of recurring malarial fever and died at Whitehall on 3rd September 1658. A violent storm wracked England during the night of his death. His enemies declared 'it was the devil carrying away his soul'. His funeral service was based on that of King James I, ironically the father of the Charles I, and cost upwards of twenty thousand pounds.



The 'Protectorate' barely lasted a year, under his son Richard, before the restoration under King Charles II. When Cromwell died he was initially buried in Westminster Abbey, but not for long. Oliver's body was exhumed and his tomb destroyed. His corpse was then dug up, hung in chains for public display and beheaded at Tyburn. It took more than one blow to sever Cromwell's head.

All of this was done on the anniversary of Charles I execution and at the behest of Parliament in December 1660.

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*Edited by Elizabeth Johnston.*