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ABRAHAM HILL, F.R.S.

From a Painting in the Possession of W. R. Hill, Esq., of Lymington, Hants.

ABRAHAM HILL, F.R.S.,
OF ST. JOHN'S, SUTTON-AT-HONE, KENT.

BY R. H. ERNEST HILL, A.R.I.B.A.

THE following remarks may serve as a continuation of the history of St. John's, the earlier portion of which is given in the interesting Paper by Mr. J. F. Wadmore, in *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XXII., p. 255; and also as a memorial of one whose family, although not natives of the county of Kent, were in possession of the Manor of St. John's for 120 years.

The original Manor was in the sixteenth century divided into two moieties, owned by two sisters, Catherine and Martha Randall. Martha carried her moiety in marriage to Thomas Cranfield, Esq., of London, whose son, Sir Randall Cranfield, executed in 7 Charles I. a writ of partition of the Manor with Sarah, Countess of Leicester, and her son Sir John Smythe, owner of the other moiety. The Cranfield portion retained the name of St. John's, and included the ancient mansion and chapel of the Knights Hospitallers and the Court Leet. Sir Randall Cranfield bequeathed his portion of the estate in 1635 to his son Vincent Cranfield, Esq., who sold it in 1649 to Thomas Hollis, a merchant of London. He and his wife Elizabeth sold it in April 1660 to Abraham Hill, Esq., of Lime Street, London, a Fellow of the Royal Society, which was founded three years later.

Hasted says, "The estate consisted of the scite and 316 acres of arable, 44 acres of coppice, 40 acres of brookland, and 17 acres of marsh land, a mill, messuage and cottage, and 80 acres of land, the whole let at £173 13s. 4d. per annum. Mr. Hill did not get possession of it till the year 1667" (*History of Kent*, 1778, vol. i., p. 237). There was also a Manor of St. John's Ash in the parish of Wrotham, which was an appendage to that at Sutton.

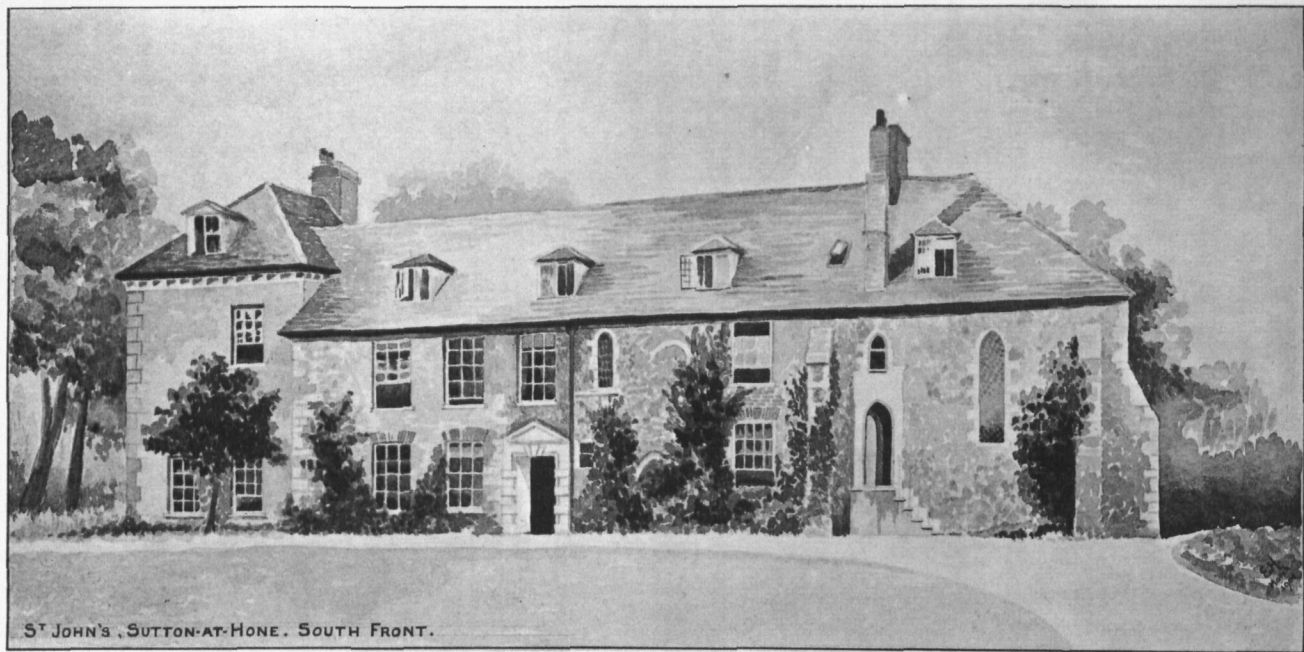
Abraham Hill, the owner of this estate for sixty-one years, was a remarkable man, although not much known to the public. His father, Richard Hill, a merchant of Lime Street, was an ardent Republican, and held office under Cromwell's Government as Treasurer to the Committee for Sequestrations in 1643, and Joint Commissioner for the sale of Prize Goods taken in the Dutch War in 1656. He also sat in the Long Parliament as Member for Truro, and was an Alderman of London in 1656.

At the time of his death in 1659-60 he had three sons living, Abraham, Thomas, and Samuel. The second son, Thomas, was a great friend of Samuel Pepys, who frequently mentions him in his Diary. The youngest son, Samuel, died at Amsterdam of the plague, and was buried there in 1665, aged 19. Abraham was born in London in 1633, and received a good education. Although he carried on business as a merchant, he found time to study at Gresham College, and was able to make the acquaintance of most of the learned men of his time in England. In this way he became one of the founders of the Royal Society mentioned in the Charter of April 22nd, 1663. He was elected Treasurer in November of that year, and held office for two years. Having been re-elected in 1679, he discharged the duties with great ability until 1700.

Among his intimate friends were Sir Hans Sloane and Dr. Isaac Barrow, the eminent theologian and mathematician, whose executor he was. Hill's life of Barrow was prefixed to the earlier editions of the latter's works, and is the only production known to have been published by him.

His reputation was such that he was chosen one of a small committee appointed by the Royal Society to enquire into the dispute between Sir Isaac Newton and Leibnitz as to their discoveries of the Method of Fluxions.

It was probably through the influence of his friends in the Society that Hill was appointed in 1696 a Commissioner of Trade and Plantations, and afterwards from June 1699 to the year 1702. There is in the British Museum a large volume of papers relating to trade, imports and exports, etc., collected by him in his official capacity, and it would seem



ST JOHN'S, SUTTON-AT-HONE. SOUTH FRONT.

that his ability was very great in this direction. The volume is numbered Sloane 2902.

In 1691 Archbishop Tillotson of Canterbury appointed him to the office of his Comptroller, "often expressing the pleasure he took in Mr. Hill's conversation, and would frequently term him his learned friend and his instructing philosopher."

But an enterprise for which Abraham Hill deserves special mention in the pages of *Archæologia Cantiana* was an attempt he made in the latter part of the seventeenth century to introduce the manufacture of cider into Kent. For this purpose he planted choice specimens of apples from Devon and Hereford on his estate, and formed large orchards in the district. The project, however, was not a success; but the orchards in time attracted a population from which sprang the village of Swanley, near by. There are also many beautiful trees of various sorts now flourishing in the grounds of St. John's said to have been planted by him.

On his beloved estate of St. John's, Abraham Hill passed the latter end of his life in studious retirement until his death there February 5th, 1721.

He was twice married. His first wife was Anne, daughter of Sir Bulstrode Whitelock, Knight, the well-known Cromwellian Ambassador to Sweden. She was married in London in 1656, and died there in 1661, leaving a son Richard (born 1660) and a daughter Frances (born 1658). The second wife was Elizabeth, daughter of Michael Pratt of Bromley-by-Bow, who was married at St. Mary Woolnoth, London, in 1661, and died at St. John's in 1672, leaving no children. Her tombstone is on the north side of Sutton Church, in the churchyard, and has the following interesting inscription:—

Hic jacet ELIZABETHA HILL ABRAHAMI UXOR, MICHAELIS PRATT de Bromley in Com. Middlesexiæ Arm: filia. Nata 25 Julii 1644. Obiit 1 Aprilis 1672. Hæc erat plena operibus bonis eleemosynis quas faciebat, factum est autem in diebus illis infirmata moreretur.

Ipse ABRAHAMUS HILL moriens 5 Feb. 1721, dixit, Spes mea in solo Jeso Christo, et qui se suscitavit, me etiam suscitare potest.

Besides the MS. above-mentioned, there is in the British Museum a large number of Hill's papers (Add. MSS. 5488, 5489), forming part of Hasted's Collections; his commonplace books in seven volumes (Sloane 2891—2901); a volume of philosophical papers by various authors collected by him (Sloane 2903); and a few letters to Sir Hans Sloane (Sloane 4048). A small collection of letters of various dates, from 1657 to 1798, has been preserved by the present head of the family, William Robinson Hill, Esq., of Lymington in Hants, and it includes the following letter written by Abraham Hill. It is the earliest known specimen of his handwriting, and has never before been printed:—

London, 8 June, 1657.

LOVING BROTHER,

Since my last of the 28 past sent to Marselia I have received yours of the 4 cur^t, and from M^r Morrell understood of your departure from Paris, so that I hope this will find you safely arrived at Livorne. The chiefest news I have to tell you acc^t of is the arrival of the three brothers* at Plymouth, but without Captⁿ Parker, hee dyed at Fort St. George about October last.

By this shipp I had a letter from M^r Squier, who stayed at Marsalapatam, taking ashoare there halfe of the general stocke and all our particular adventure, intending to invest it there against the shippes returne, but she in her voyage to Bengala is doubted to be wrackt, no news of her coming in ordinary expectation.

Hee acquaints mee that going aboard with Capt^t Lucas and some others in a close boat, she was overset and they so underset that they were in water to the necks, and the boats keel over there heads, having so much aire inclosed (by the sudden motion of the vessell) that served to keep them alive. Thus when they had stayed two hours, the boat driving ashoare they made some strange shift to get out, but that was to the sand; whereon they had a mile and half to goe, and the sun so hot that the skin peeld of their bodys, and some more particulars of there danger hee mentions, but the whole story appears not cleare and the built of those vessells being unknowne to us, but hee accompts it for a wonderfull deliverance. . . . At Florence the person with whom M^r Barrow was

* A merchant ship owned by Abraham Hill and his two brothers.



MONUMENT TO ABRAHAM HILL IN SUTTON-AT-HONE CHURCH

12 inches 6 0 1 2 3 Feet

acquainted and was keeper of the great Dukes medails was as I take it one M^r Fitton, whose letter to Sir K. Digby about the petryfyed citty was printed.

I rest,
Yo^r very lo: Brother,
A. HILL.

(Addressed)

To M^r THOMAS HILL,
march.,
in house of M^r THO. DETHICK,
march.,
Livorne.

Hill's monument was erected by his daughter Frances, and is on the east wall of the south aisle of Sutton Church. It consists of a slab of white veined marble containing an inscription, flanked by pilasters, which carry a cornice and rest on a bracket underneath, all of marble. The bracket has a shield with the arms of Hill (Argent, a chevron between three water-bougets sable), and on the cornice is an urn between two shields—the dexter, HILL, impaling Azure, a chevron between three eaglets close or, for WHITELOCK; and the sinister, HILL, impaling Azure, three bezants, each charged with a martlet of the field, and a chief or, for PRATT. The inscription in Latin is as follows:—

Juxta sepultus est ABRAHAMUS HILL, Armiger,
Vir moribus virtuti aptissimis, cultissimis, simul et
humillimis, amicis suavis, nulli molestus.

Ingenium illi et vividum et solidum erat,
Judicium acre omnia rimans;

Et ad intima rerum, qua sorti humanæ datum est penetrans.

Memoria tam ampla, ut omnia in illa recondita fuisse,

Tam fida ut nulla excidisse,

Tam præsens et promota ut singula eorum fuisse viderentur.

His dotibus instructus

Inter præclaros illos qui Reg. Soc. Fundamenta posuerunt et deinde

Per LXXX annos Rem philosophicam adauxerunt, eximie emicuit:

Et illorum cuique illustrioris notæ semper charissimus fuit.

Rebus publicis per paucos annos se immiscuit,

Dum inter Summos Curatores Commercii Publici dignissime

Sedem occupavit. Vir ille, Sapientia nulla non versatus

Sed inter cuncta, doctissimus in illa Ratione, qua leniter
 Ævum traducere, pure et tranquille possit
 In Secreto Itinere, et fallentis Semita Vitæ :
 Se quoties reficiebat gelidus Darventio Rivus
 Quem Sutton Cantiana bibit.
 Cum bona Librorum Copia, Opulenti Fortuna, æquo Animo,
 Corpore nullis fere Morbis læso,
 Mente Supremum usque Diem Vegeto,
 Sibi et Deo vixit.
 Filius erat ABRAHAMUS ille, RICHARDI HILL Armigeri,
 Ex Devonæ orti.
 Duas duxit Uxores ; primam ANNAM filiam Cl. V. BULSTRODE
 WHITLOCK Mil.
 Ex FRANCISCA filia GULIELMI Baronis WILLOUBY de Parham.
 Secundam ELIZABETHAM filiam MICHAELIS PRATT Arm.
 Ex priore coniugio reliquit FRANCISCAM et RICHARDUM.
 Natus 10 Apr. 1633. Obiit 5 Feb. 1721.
 Filio eius RICHARDO obeunte 14 Martii 1721,
 FRANCISCA hæres utriusque, hoc Marmor lugens posuit.

The arms used on this monument are those of the Hills of Shilston in Devonshire, who settled there in the reign of Richard II. Abraham's descent from this family is given by Hasted, and by other county histories, so that there seems no reason to doubt it, although actual proofs up to the present have not been forthcoming.

After so comprehensive an epitaph as the foregoing, it remains only to mention Hill's will, which is dated August 29th, 1717. By it he gave to his daughter Frances a yearly rent-charge of £120 out of all his lands, which latter he left to his son Richard. To her he also gave £2000 in Bank Stock, and all the goods in his house at Sutton. Richard was appointed executor, and he accordingly obtained probate in the P.C.C. (54, Marlboro') March 13th, 1721.

The next owner of St. John's was Richard Hill, who, however, only survived his father a little more than a month, aged 61. He seems to have lived quietly at St. John's all his life, and did not distinguish himself in any way; in fact his epitaph tells us nearly all that is known about him. His

monument adjoins that of Abraham in Sutton Church, and has this inscription :—

Near this place lies buried
 RICHARD HILL, Esq.,
 Only son of ABRAHAM HILL, Esq.
 He married Mrs. FRANKS,
 To whom he proved a most loving husband
 For seven years and four months.
 When dying 14 March 1721-22
 He left his widow
 More than her original fortune
 Besides a fair joynture.
 But as he had no child by her
 To preserve his name,
 And she having married in 1723
 With FRANCIS BATHURST, Esq.,
 Of Franks in Horton,
 His only sister Mrs. FRANCES HILL
 Thinking her Brother's ashes
 Too much neglected,
 Erected this small monument
 As a memorial of her Brother,
 And to testify a Sister's love.

The "Mrs. Franks" above-mentioned was Frances, daughter of Edmund Eyre, of an old Bucks family. She died in 1725, and is buried in Horton Kirby Church. She is said to have removed to Franks the stained-glass windows from the old chapel of St. John's, and perhaps it was this that originated the ill-will of her sister-in-law which is so evident in the epitaph just quoted.

Frances, the only daughter of Abraham Hill, next came into possession of St. John's, and of some land forming part of the estate of Summerhill, near Tonbridge, which her father had bought of John Villiers in 1705 for £4565 (*Hasted*, vol. ii., p. 341). She passed her long life at St. John's, and died there unmarried at the age of 78.

Among the family letters are several amusing ones from a John Hill, who claimed to be a relative, and professed to have rights to an estate, although he was not at all clear on

the subject. He went so far as to come up from Devonshire to Sutton, where he lodged at the "Pope and Crown," but a curt refusal from Frances to have anything to do with him appears to have discouraged him, and as she kept possession of her estate in spite of his claims, he probably found it best to return home and say no more about it.

Her tomb in the nave of Sutton Church is covered by a marble slab, with the Hill arms in a lozenge, below which is an inscription mentioned by Hasted as "remarkable and singular." It runs as follows:—

Here lyeth the Body of
Mrs. FRANCES HILL,
daughter of ABRAHAM HILL, Esq., and great-granddaughter
of WILLIAM, Lord WILLUGHBY of Parham.
She was born 29 Jan. 1658, and died 28 Oct. 1736,
and served God in pure virginity, and abstinence
from wine and strong drink,
without a vow.

The number of her years had taken very little
from the Comeliness of her Person,
less from the Vivacity of her Parts,
nothing from the Goodness of her Temper,
which gained her many Friends, and endeared
her to them daily more and more.

After a life of much steady Health, she was taken off
in a three-days sickness ;
and in much Christian hope,
to her own great content,
she surrendered her soul
to God.

In addition to this memorial there is a mural monument on the south wall of the south aisle of the church, in which her effigy is represented as far as the waist, looking towards the east, and drawing back a veil from her face with the left hand. A Latin epitaph below repeats the sentiments of the English one in the nave. There is a tradition current in Sutton-at-Hone to the effect that Frances died from the effects of a needle-prick in one finger, which happened through her doing needlework on a Sunday! Her effigy is supposed

to be holding up the injured hand in corroboration of the story, but an inspection of the monument hardly confirms this idea, and one has somehow heard the same tragic fate related of other ladies as well.

By her will, dated July 23rd, 1722, Frances Hill bequeathed all her lands and manors to her cousin William Hill of Falmouth, merchant, eldest son of Peter Hill, merchant, of the same place. Among other bequests she left £5 to the poor of Sutton-at-Hone, and one acre of ground to the almshouses lately built in Sutton Street by her father. (He had added two houses in 1720 to the Wrote foundation of 1597.) A codicil was added May 9th, 1730, in which, as William Hill of Falmouth had lately died, her estates were left to his eldest son William, and in default of issue, to Peter, Richard, Abraham, and John successively, the younger sons. The widow, Charity Hill, was executrix to Frances, whose will she proved in the P.C.C. November 1736.

The next possessor of St. John's was a Cornishman, living at the manor of Carwythenack, near Helston. He was under age at the time he came into his cousin's property, but in 1755 he let St. John's on a long lease to Edward Hasted, the well-known Kentish historian, and lived in Cornwall for the rest of his life. Of his numerous descendants one branch now resides at Bromley in Kent, only about ten miles from Sutton.

William Hill in about 1768 sold the land which Abraham had bought at Summerhill to Edward Whatman of Salisbury, and in 1780 disposed of St. John's to Mr. John Mumford of Sutton Place. This gentleman died in 1796, leaving the Manor of St. John's to his eldest son William, and the Mansion to his youngest son John. John Mumford the younger died without issue, leaving the mansion first to his wife, and at her death to his niece Miss Leigh. It was afterwards held by Mrs. Tracy, another niece, and in 1859 was bought by William Thomas Elgar, Esq., who gave it to his only daughter Sarah, wife of John Russell, Esq., of Horton Kirby, who with their family are still living there.

The mansion occupies a site enclosed by the river Darent (the "*Darventio rivus, quem Sutton Cantiana bibit*"), which

supplied a double moat round the Knights' buildings. The measured drawing of the chapel in Vol. XXII. shews the only portion of the original edifice now remaining. This is of the Early English style, and the entire chapel is estimated to have been 101 feet in length. The basement of the tower which stood at the north-west corner is now the drawing-room, and the walls are extremely thick. During some repairs in 1870 the piscina and aumbry of the chapel were discovered behind some plaster, also a recess supposed to have been the Easter Sepulchre.

The main buildings appear to have stood round three sides of a quadrangle, and to have been flanked on the north and south sides by large ranges of stabling and offices, the foundations of which are traceable in the grass.

The present mansion-house does not possess much interest, except from its association with Hasted, who in 1755 made alterations in and practically rebuilt the house then existing at considerable expense. The roof of the chapel was also lowered in his time. When Miss Leigh occupied the house some remains of ancient armour were discovered in the grounds. She presented them to some museum, but unfortunately the locality of the museum is now unknown.

It only remains now to mention the illustrations.

The portrait of Abraham Hill is reproduced from a very fine oil painting now in possession of the head of the family at Lymington. The view of St. John's was made by the kind permission of Mr. Russell, to whose family also the writer is greatly indebted for much of the foregoing history, and for their hospitality on the occasions of his visits. The measured drawing of Abraham Hill's monument was made for this article with the kind assistance of the Rev. W. J. Weekes, Vicar of Sutton-at-Hone.