

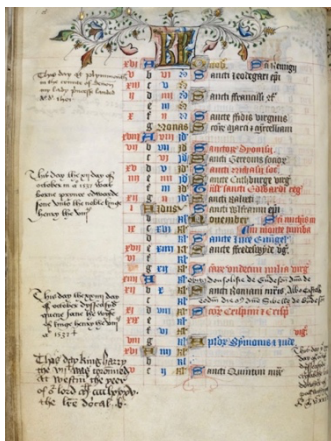


St. Margaret's Church

I P S W I C H

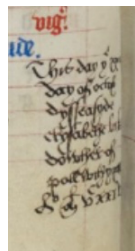
The Life of Elizabeth Withypoll, later Lucar

In 1545 Paul Withypoll, with his son Edmund, bought the lands of Holy Trinity Priory, Ipswich, where Christchurch Mansion and St Margaret's church now stand, from Sir Thomas Pope. Three years earlier, on 11th December 1542, "Powle Wythypoll, citiezein and merchaunt Taillour of London" had made his will. In it he asked to be buried in his parish church of St Lawrence, Poultney, London "there as my Doghter Leuker lyeth.



Courtesy British Library

In a Book of Hours, probably made in the early 15th century for John de Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, and, by the early 16th century, in the possession of the Withypoll family it was noted:-



"This day ye xxix day of October dysseasyde Elysabethe lukar dowther of Poll Withypoll anno m v xxxvij"

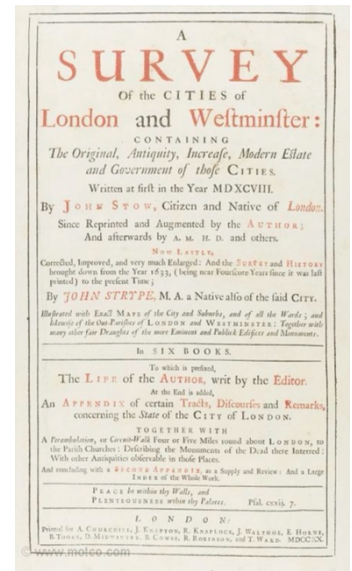
Elizabeth, Paul's only daughter, was born about 1510 and in 1532 married Emanuel Lucar (1494-1574), another London Merchant Taylor, who later became Master of the Company. She died in 1537 "of yeeres not fully 27" having borne four children.

One cannot help but think that the bearing of four children in five years may well have contributed to her demise!

With a known high mortality rate in childbirth, St Margaret of Antioch, to whom our church is dedicated, was very popular as the Patron Saint of women in labour. It has also been suggested that the popularity of the name Margaret may stem from the invocation of the Saint at such moments.

Ironically, her four children seem to have thrived and were alive in 1574 when Emanuel Lucar made his will.

The church of St Lawrence, Poultney was destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666 and not rebuilt. Thus all record of Elizabeth could have been lost but for the keen antiquarian interests of John Stowe (1525-1605) a Merchant Tailor of the City of London. In about 1560 he began his "Survey of London" which was published in 1598. It is a detailed account of the topography of London, its walls, schools and buildings, ward by ward. It even mentions those structures destroyed during Protestant reforms. The book was so popular that various editions with additions by Anthony Munday (1618), Munday and Dyson (1633) and John Strype (1720) were published. Indeed other editions appeared until a standard version was produced in 1908. It is to these later editions that we owe the survival of the remarkable epitaph of Elizabeth Lucar.



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Stowe records the inscription of her gravestone in the south aisle of St. Lawrence, Pountney. It is a tribute to a remarkable woman for the time and may explain why her father Paul expressly desired to be buried near her.

“Every Christian heart seeketh to extol
The glory of the Lord our onely redeemer
Wherefore Dame Fame must needs enrol
Paul Withypoll his childe by love and Nature
Elizabeth, the wife of Emanuel Lucar,
With many high virtues which truly I will record
She wrought all needle-workes that women exercise
With pen, Frame, or Stoole, all Pictures artificiall,
Curious Knots or Trailes, what fancy would devise,
Beasts ,Birds, or Flowers, even as things naturall:
Three manner hands could she write, them faire all.
Dame Cunning her gave a gift right excellent,
The goodly practice of her Science Musicall,
In divers tongues to sing, and play with Instrument,
Both Viall and Lute, and also virginnall;
Not onely upon one, but excellent in all.
For all other vertues belonging to Nature,
God her appointed a very perfect creature.
Latine and Spanish and also Italian,
She spake, writ and read with perfect utterance;
And for the English, she the Garland wan.
In Dame Prudence Schoole, by Graces purveyance,
Which cloathed her with Vertues, from naked Ignorance:
Reading the Scriptures, to fight light from darke,
Directing her faith to Christ, the onely marke.

Elizabeth's brother Edmund, as was usual, had received an excellent education for the time. He had been tutored by the humanist rector of St. Martin's, Ludgate, Thomas Lupset, who dedicated his book "An Exhortation to Young Men" to Edmund in 1529. Edmund could also have attended one of the many schools which had been established in London following a petition to Henry VI: these include St Paul's, Merchant Taylors and Charterhouse etc. plus free schools in Southwark and Westminster. Edmund's pleasure in his classical training is evidenced by the Latin texts he engraved on the walls of Christchurch Mansion!

How Elizabeth came to be so well educated is something of a mystery as girls' schools did not exist. Her knowledge of Italian may have derived from the family links with Italy. Her father was an expert in Italy and its trading practices. Such was his expertise that he was used to adjudicate disputes between English and Italian merchants in the City of London. He also had money in the famous bank of St George in Genoa, one of the oldest chartered banks in the world, as had his cousin Thorne in Bristol.

What is surprising is how well Elizabeth was educated for someone of her class; its range is wide. An even more formidably contemporary living in the same area was Margaret More who was taught by her father Sir Thomas More, Henry VIII's Chancellor. However no connection is obvious.

Writing, the ability to read the religious books, and to sew would be the more usual constituents of the upbringing of a girl of a mercantile background. Elizabeth's education, ranging from fine needlework, various musical talents plus fluent language skills is that of someone of a higher status. For example, Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife (1510-32?) had been highly educated by her mother Queen Isabella of Spain. As well as dancing, drawing, music, sewing, spinning, horsemanship, falconry, reading, she and her sisters were so well drilled in the Classics that they were able to reply in extempore Latin to the speeches of ambassadors. She engaged fine tutors for her daughter Mary. Indeed, Mary's siblings, Princess Elizabeth, Prince Edward and cousin, Lady Jane Grey, were all exceptionally well educated. But Elizabeth Withipoll was not being prepared for such a royal destiny so why was she so well educated?

If one compares epitaphs to other women in the same era, which were recorded by Stowe, they are almost all brief. Their marital status, their family background if notable, their children and their survival are the norm. Occasionally their dutifulness and piety are mentioned. For example:-

comfortably in true marriage, a most faithful and loving wife.....she lived virtuously and modestly ... (St Gregory's church, Castle Baynard Ward in the City of London 1589)

A learned woman was a matter of great concern to men generally. They were already suspect as descendants of Eve who brought Sin into the world by falling for the wiles of the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

Their judgement could not be trusted. Richard Hyrde wrote in 1524 that

“Many men put great doubt whether it should be expedient and requisite or not, a woman to have learning in books of Latin and Greek. And some utterly affirm that it is not only neither necessary nor profitable but also very noisome and jeopardous. Alleging for their own opinion that the frail kind of woman, being inclined of their own courage into vice and mutable at every novelty, if they should have skill in many things that be written in the Latin and Greek tongue.....it would inflame their stomachs a great deal the more to that vice that men say they be too much given unto their own nature already.”

In 1747, the anonymous writer of “The Art of Governing a Wife with Rules for Bachelors” states that the husband “must govern with absolute power” while the duty of wives “was not to understand but to obey”.

Even in the early 19th century, education for a suitable marriage runs through Jane Austen’s novels.

“A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and modern languages” plus a pleasing manner says Caroline Bingley in “Pride and Prejudice”.

Although Jane Eyre railed against it, the notion persisted.

Despite these attitudes, a multi talented woman (and helpfully wealthy!) Elizabeth Cobbold (1764-1824) the second wife of John Cobbold, who set up the Cobbold Brewery in Ipswich, made her mark intruding into the male scientific world.

But this was exceptional and, far more in keeping with the conventions of the times, was Susanna Edgar (1763-1839), Elizabeth Cobbold’s contemporary. Her memorial is in St Margaret’s Church on the north aisle wall:-

“Such was her regular and devout attention to the religious duties of life and such was her tenderness and affection in the discharge of the relative duties of a wife, a parent and a friend that she lived most dearly and deservedly beloved and died most deeply lamented. In grateful testimony of her virtues and of her unremitting attention to the welfare and happiness of her husband he has caused this tablet to be erected to her memory”.

What a contrast to Elizabeth Lucar’s epitaph by her husband!