THOMAS ELLIS, GENTLEMAN AND MERCHANT, ALDERMAN AND MAYOR OF DONCASTER

***by John M Ellis*[1]**

ABSTRACT

Born at the very end of the medieval period, Thomas Ellis was a philanthropist who was active in local affairs and business in south Yorkshire. The author has researched the surviving records to create a prosopographical account of his life and work.

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One of the most prominent residents of Doncaster in the 16th century was Alderman Thomas Ellis. He was reputed to have been Mayor upon five occasions, *ie* in 1522, 1532, 1543, 1553 and 1559, but it is not possible to be certain of that because the recorded appointments of mayors do not begin until 1568; however, on the epitaph which Thoresby says he "*writ from the tomb in Doncaster church*", he is said to have been Mayor five times (Jackson, 1881, p.54, note d).

His Arms

On 5 February 1548/9 he received a Confirmation of Arms[2] from Gilbert Dethick, Norroy King of Arms, given and granted at London: "*To all Nobles and gentles..... And Forasmuch as Thomas Ellis of Doncaster in the County of Yorke gentleman is descended of an ancient house of long time beareing Armes, Neverthelesse he vncertaine vnder what sorte his Ancestors beare their said Armes hath desired me the said Norrey King of Armes to sett forthe his said Armes due and lawfull to be borne. And therefore I the said Norrey seing his request soe iust and reasonable by ye authoritie and power annexed attributed given and granted by the King, our Soueraigne Lords highnes, to me and to my Office of Norrey, King of Armes by express words, vnder his most Noble great Seale, have ordeined assigned and sett Forthe his said Armes in manner hereafter followeth. That is to say, 'Gold on a plaine crosse sable five Cressants silves': As more plainly appeareth depicted in this margent. To have and to hold to the said Thomas Ellis gentleman for him and his posteritie. In witnes ..... "*. The Arms are differenced with a mullet in the docket in the College of Arms, London - Old Grants, I, No. 89 (Littledale, 1925; Jackson, 1881, p.55, note d).

His Ancestors

In 1881 Charles Jackson stated that nothing authentic so far concerning the parentage and family of Thomas Ellis had been discovered though considerable research had been employed in the endeavour to do so (Jackson, p.54). He is not placed in the pedigrees recorded at the Heralds' Visitations of Yorkshire of the Ellis family of Kiddal Hall in the parish of Barwick-in-Elmet, or of the Ellis family of Lepton and Barnburgh, but there are some grounds for submitting that. he did, in all probability belong to one of those families, and these are:

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2 This Confirmation is in Harleian Ms. 1359, folio 59, and in Ms. Queen's College 40, No.21.

(1) The Confirmation of 5 February 1548/9, confirmed his right to bear the Arms lawfully belonging to Ellis of Kiddal (or, on a cross sable five crescents argent), and it would appear that he had proved to the satisfaction of the Heralds that he had a just claim to them, and, as if the better to identify him, they added or allowed a mullet by way of the usual differential mark of his being either a third son, or of his being descended from a third house or branch.

(2) Thomas Ellis does not mention any relatives or friends of his own name in his Will, but he left to Mr Anne's daughter, his god-daughter, a silver-gilt cup and cover, and to Mr Martin Anne 40s. He was Martin Anne (died 25 November 1582), of Frickley, and his daughter Mary married John Ellis (died 5 April 1637), of Kiddal. In addition to Mary, Martin Anne had seven more daughters, Elizabeth, Dorothy, Jane, Agnes, Frances, Allas and Anne, and which one was the god-daughter of Thomas Ellis has yet to be determined (Clay, 1907; Dendy, 1912; Foster, 1875, p.361; Jackson, 1881, pp.54-56; Norcliffe, 1881).

(3) Nicholas Scargill, Alderman of Doncaster, who married Elizabeth, daughter of John Ellis of Barnburgh at Doncaster on 13 November 1564, expressed the wish in his Will dated 10 August 1585 and proved at York 7 December following, that he should be buried "*nyghe unto Mr. Thomas Ellls, lait of Doncaster*". The pedigree of Ellis of Barnburgh was recorded in Glover's Visitation of Yorkshire 1584-5, the Arms entered were Or, on a cross sable 5 crescents argent, a crescent for difference (Foster, 1875, p.135).

(4) John Ellis, of Bilham, in the parish of Hoton Panell (Hooton Pagnell), whose Will dated 12 September 1534 and proved at York 13 November following, named his sons Sir Percevall Ellis (presumably a priest), William Ellis, John Ellis, Thomas Ellis, and daughters Katryne and Alice, and appointed "*maister John of Anne*" supervisor thereof. This would be John Anne of Frickley, the father of Martin Anne, and possibly another link between the Ellis and Anne families. Was that Thomas Ellis the Thomas Ellis of Doncaster? Also, in the Fines at the Public Record Office is one in the Easter Term, 1544, between Richard Ellys, plaintiff, and Thomas Ellys and Elizabeth his wife deforciants, concerning divers messuages, lands, etc., in Bilham, and those deforciants were Thomas Ellis, of Doncaster, and Elizabeth his wife, and that transaction might point to a relationship between Thomas of Doncaster and the Ellis family of Bilham (Collins, 1891; Jackson, 1881, appendix p.xviii).

His Charities

In 1558 Thomas Ellis founded and endowed the Hospital of St. Thomas the Apostle in Doncaster, which stood on the right-hand side of the street known as "Far St. Sepulchre-gate", or "St. Sepulchre-gate without the bars", on the road leading from the once fortified town of Doncaster to Sheffield. An inscription on a stone over the entrance gateway read - "*St. Thos. Hospital endowed by Thos. Ellis Alderman A.D. 1558*". The Deed of Endowment is dated 10 October 1557, and by it he conveyed sundry of his properties and lands in Cantley, Brampton, Doncaster, Hexthorpe with Balby, Wheatley and Carr-house in the parish of Doncaster to feoffees and various portions of the property originally vested in the feoffees under the Deed of Endowment have been alienated by sale or exchange (Jackson, pp.53, 54, 58, 59, and appendix pp.v to xvii)[3].

[3] The reference provides a full copy of the Deed of Endowment in Latin together with an English translation

In his Will Thomas Ellis gave a house in a street by St. Mary Magdalene's churchyard, five messuages or cottages in Fisher-gate, an annual chief rent of 6d. issuing out of a house, and two tofts in Fisher-gate, towards the making of' a Free Grammar School in Doncaster, the same to be received immediately after his death by his feoffees named in the Deed of Foundation relating to the Hospital of St. Thomas the Apostle. He also built the "Lodges" (probably places for lodging poor wayfaring people) and the Market Cross in Doncaster (Jackson, pp.6, 28, 29, 56, 57).

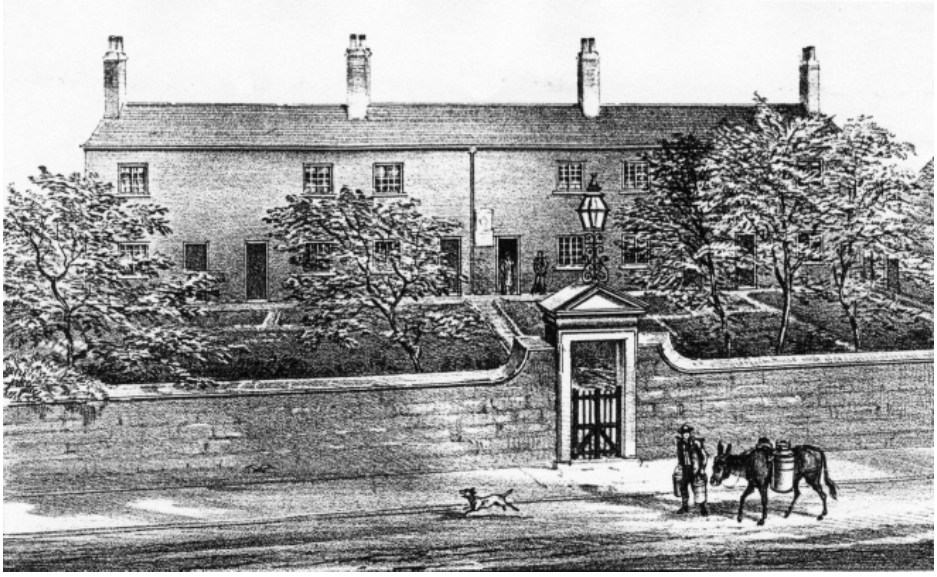


Fig 1. ***The hospital of St Thomas the Apostle, Doncaster*** *[from Jackson, 1881]*

His Relatives

His wife Elizabeth, named in his will and described as "*my now wife*", had apparently had two previous husbands before she married Thomas Ellis, firstly .....Lewys, of Doncaster, and secondly Richard Marshall, of Doncaster, Alderman. It does not appear that Elizabeth left any issue by Thomas Ellis, or that he had any issue by a previous wife or wives; - "*my now wife*" suggests that he had indeed been married before he married Elizabeth. She was buried at Doncaster 19 December 1567 as "*Elizabeth Ellys, lait wife of Mr Thomas Ellys*".

The only relative, other than his wife, whom Thomas Ellis mentions as such in his Will is his sister Margaret Fulwood, wife of Thomas Fulwood, Alderman. However, in 1610, "*Edmund Thwaites, of Doncaster, Alderman, and Jennett his wife, one of the cousins and next heirs of Thomas Ellis, and Thomas Pynder and Alice his wife, one other of the cousins and next heirs of Thomas Ellis*", allegedly entered into the property comprised in the Deed of Endowment, for some supposed default on the part of the feoffees of the Hospital, and made leases of some parts of it.

It is not known when Thomas Ellis settled in Doncaster where he continued to live until his death in 1562, but as he was first elected Mayor in 1522, he must have become a resident early in life, and engaged in a successful business there, despite the fact that he apparently passed through a long life without being able to write his

own name as his signature to the Deed of Endowment of the Hospital is a scrawl intended to represent his initials T.E. His illiteracy was apparently not unusual, as out of 35 members of Doncaster Corporation who subscribed to a document of 15 October 1568, 21 of them did so by their "markes" or "sygnes" (Figure 2). Where he was born is not known, but if he was in fact first elected Mayor of Doncaster in 1522, an age of 30 in that year would appear to be a reasonable estimate, and give an approximate birth year of 1492 (Jackson, p.56).

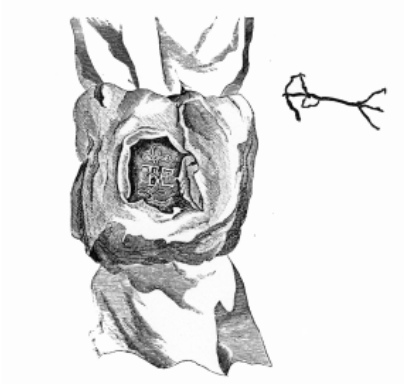


Fig 2. ***The seal and mark of Thomas Ellis on the Deed of Endowment dated the 10 October 1557***
[from Jackson, 1881]

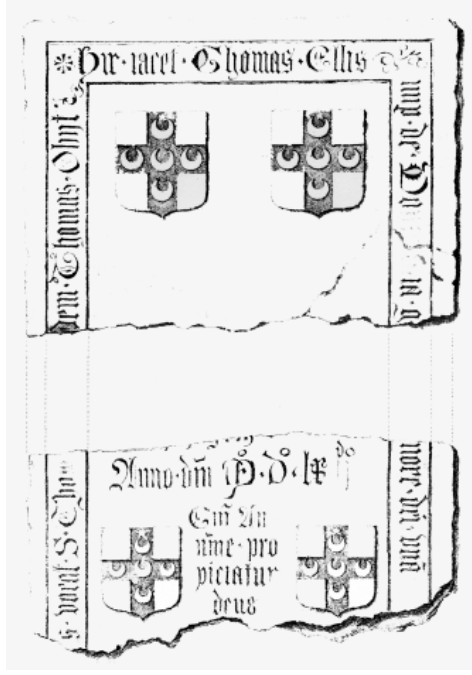


Fig 3 ***Original Tombstone of Thomas Ellis, Alderman***
[from Jackson, 1881]

His Death

Thomas Ellis died on 15 July 1562, and was buried on 17 of that month, in the Lady Quire, near St Thomas's altar in the parish church of St. George in Doncaster in accordance with his wish as stated in his Will. This old parish church was totally destroyed by fire on 28 February 1853. and his original gravestone was discovered under the flooring on the removal of the debris, the inscription being in Latin and it had incurred some damage (see Figure 3).

An English rendering of the inscription, printed in Miller's "History of Doncaster", page 81, which was taken from Dodworth's "Church Notes", is as follows: "*Here lyes Thomas Ellis, late of Doncaster, gentleman and alderman, who, in honour of God, founded one hospital in the same towne for the poore, called St. Thomas house the Apostle. Which Thomas dyed tbe XV day of the moneth of July, A.D. M.D.L.XII, on whose soule Jesu have mercy, Amen"*. His tomb (Figure 4) was of sculptured freestone and stood within a canopy under the middle north window of the north quire of the old parish church, and was totally destroyed in the fire of 28 February 1853 (Jackson, pp.57, 58).



Fig 4 ***Tomb of Thomas Ellis, Alderman, in Doncaster Church.***
Destroyed by the fire in 1853 [from Jackson, 1881]

His Will

Thomas Ellis was undoubtedly a person of very considerable substance, wealthy through his business activities as demonstrated by his gift to charitable purposes *of* the lands and properties specified in his Deed of Endowment concerning the Hospital of St Thomas the Apostle, and also by the dispositions contained in his will, made as "*of Doncaster gentleman*", and dated 4 April 1562 and proved at York 9 December following. He wished his body to be buried in the parish church of St George, in Doncaster, in Our Lady quire, of that side towards St Thomas's altar, in the place where Sir Robert Smyth was buried.

His will is a lengthy document and contains the following references to his relatives: Elizabeth his wife who received various properties for her life; his sister Margaret Fulwood, wife of Thomas Fulwood, Alderman; Johan Thwaites (a cousin), wife of Edmund Thwaites, of Doncaster, Alderman, and Edmund and Robert her sons; Alice (a cousin), wife of Thomas Pynder, of Fishlake, and their children. He gave bequests to his god-sons and god-daughters, and to sundry other beneficiaries mentioned in his Will. He gave lands and houses to his feoffees named in his Deed of Endowment concerning the Hospital of St Thomas the Apostle, towards the making of one Free Grammar School in Doncaster. His business activities extended to dealings with the higher nobility: "*whereas one Robert Townley, now servant to the Right Honble my Lord of Shrewsbury* (George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, K.G., died 18 November 1590) *doth owe me for certain wine which he received of me before the death of my old Lord of Shrewsbury* (Francis, fifth earl of Shrewsbury, K.G., born 1500, died 21 September 1560), *which amounteth to the sum of £10 3s. 4d.; and also £2 7s. 2d. which my Lady of Shrewsbury, that now is, doth owe me for certain parcels as appeareth in my book, I will and bequeath that my executors shall bestow that sum, as they receive it, to the marriage of poor maidens, in their discretion. And also wheres my Lady of Northumberland* (Mary, sister of the above-named Francis, fifth earl of Shrewsbury, and wife of Henry Algernon Percy,

sixth earl of Northumberland. She was then a widow, the earl having died 30 June 1537) *doth owe me £8 as appeareth by a bill thereof, I will that my said executors shall, bestow the same to maidens marriage in like manner as is above said*" (Gibbons, 1893; Jackson, 1881, p.56 and appendix pp.xviii to xxii).

Further Studies

In an attempt to discover further details of the ancestors and relatives of Thomas Ellis, the following research could be suggested:

(a) Doncaster Parish Registers begin in 1557, obviously valueless as regards baptisms and marriages, given his approximate birth date of 1492; burials might however be more informative.

(b) An extensive search of the Register copies of Yorkshire Wills now in the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York, for probable or possible relatives might yield relevant information.

(c) The pedigrees of Thomas Fulwood (his sister Margaret's husband), Edmund Thwaites (his cousin Jennett's husband), and of Thomas Pynder (his cousin Alice's husband) should be investigated.

(d) Edmund Thwaites of Doncaster, Alderman, his cousin's husband, could well have been a member of the gentry family of Thwaites of Lofthouse. That family is believed to have been allied by marriage to the Ellis family of Kiddal; the wife of Henry Elys of Kiddal (died 1 April 1471) was probably Agnes Thwaites.

In common with many genealogical problems, much more research could be done.

Gazetteer of places Mentioned in this Article

Abbreviations:
E - east, N - north, S - south, W - west;
m. - mile, par. - parish, R - Riding, vil. - village, Yorks. - Yorkshire.

Balby: S Yorks. district of Doncaster, 2m. SW of town centre.

Barnburgh: par. and vil., WR Yorks. 6m. W of Doncaster.

Barwick-in-Elmet: par. WR Yorks. 7m. NE of Leeds.

Bilham: former par. WR Yorks. 6½m. NW of Doncaster, now in Hooton Pagnell par.

Brampton: S Yorks. 1¼m. SE of Wombwell.

Cantley: S Yorks. vil. 4m. E of Doncaster.

Clayton with Frickley: par. and vil. WR Yorks. 8m. NW of Doncaster.

Fishlake: S Yorks. vil. 3m. N. of Hatfield.

Frickley: hamlet and seat WR Yorks. 3m. NE of Bolton-upon-Deane, 1½m. W of Hooton Pagnell.

Hooton Pagnell (Hoton Panell): par. WR Yorks. 6m. WNW of Doncaster.

Kiddal Hall: seat WR Yorks. 1½m. N of Barwick-in-Elmet.

Hexthorpe: S Yorks. district of Doncaster, 1m. SW of town centre.

Lepton: vil. WR Yorks. 4¾m. ESE of Huddersfield.

Lofthouse: WR Yorks. vil. 3m. N of Wakefield.

Wheatley Hills: S Yorks. district of Doncaster, 2m. NE of town centre.

Wheatley Park: S Yorks. district of Doncaster, 1¼m. NE of town centre.

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