

Sir Hugh Calveley

Chronologically, the first of our heroes is Sir Hugh Calveley, born c.1320, the eldest son of David de Calveley of Lea, and his wife, Joanna. The family had held the manor of Calveley, a township of Bunbury, since the time of King John. During his lifetime Sir Hugh achieved both national and international fame for his exploits. At one time Hugh Calveley led a free company of soldiers perhaps best described, in modern terms, as mercenaries in the Hundred Years War, and received his knighthood after success in Brittany c.1346. Certainly some of Sir Hugh's exploits were of doubtful legality as in 1354 he was pardoned for "all felonies, trespasses and oulwards" committed before 10 September 1353 and granted letters of protection prior to further service in Brittany for the King. Clearly he received English Royal favour for, at various times, he was Seneschal of Calais, an Admiral of the English Fleet, Captain of Brest and Governor of the Channel Islands. Sir Hugh also campaigned in France, Gascony, Flanders and Spain. In Spain he received many honours from both the rival claimants to the throne of Castile and it has been stated that he married Dona Constance of Aragon, possibly a daughter of King Peter IV.

Sir Hugh Calveley's reputation has survived the centuries being described as "a giant of a man, with projecting cheek bones, a receding hair line, red hair and long teeth." He had a large appetite eating as much as four men and drinking as much as ten. He was kind and chivalrous, honoured among men and of great strength. He was a religious man, whenever he seized booty he had it sprinkled with holy water, to absolve him of his sins in taking it! In later life, he became a generous benefactor to Bunbury Church.

Sir Hugh's connection with Bunbury Church dates from 1385 when he purchased the advowson. Traditionally Sir Hugh is credited with being the founder of the present Bunbury Church, but architectural considerations suggest he adapted the existing stone church to his own needs, possibly to ease his way to heaven, after an adventurous and perhaps not, an entirely chivalrous career. He also founded and endowed a College at Bunbury in 1387, which consisted of a warden, sub-warden, two chaplains and two choristers, to say daily prayers for his soul, the king and their respective ancestors. Some years after the Dissolution in the reign of Edward VI, the patronage of the church was bought by Thomas Aldersey, a Haberdasher, in 1595. Later the patronage passed to the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers who remain the Patrons in the year 2000.

Without doubt Sir Hugh Calveley's association with Bunbury Church has been remembered continuously since his death on 23 April 1394. Certainly every bride coming to the altar has detoured around Sir Hugh's Calveley magnificent tomb situated in the centre of the chancel.

It is noteworthy that a chancel tomb location is usually assigned to none but a king, but maybe Sir Hugh, as "owner" of Bunbury Church thought he had a similar entitlement. The white alabaster effigy confirms his great stature and his claim to be "the giant of Bunbury".

Yet another puzzle concerning Sir Hugh Calveley is posed by his tomb for it is uncertain even if Sir Hugh was ever buried at Bunbury. There is no evidence for

or against, and the tomb may be merely a cenotaph erected by his campaign companion and probably close relative, Sir Robert Knollys. In an attempt to clarify this uncertainty the tomb was opened on 25 April 1848, and according to Jno.Fenna, Churchwarden, "I found the fragments of an oak coffin, apparently of uncommon size, almost crumbled to dust; the handles of the sides being iron were nearly entire. By the side of his coffin lay a lead coffin quite fresh, with the initials D.M.C. which I suppose to be that of Dame Mary Calveley. I measured some of the bones, which I have no doubt were Sir Hugh's, from their extraordinary size, . . . the thigh-bone, was two inches or more larger than the average size of men. He is supposed to have measured seven feet six inches in height when he lived. There is a mark on the wall in Bunbury Church [probably lost in the 1865 restoration] which old people say was the memorandum of his height." Despite the above statement, later historians consider the bones "were quite clearly those of Dame Mary Calveley (ob.1705) and her husband, another Sir Hugh Calveley (ob.1648)." What is certain, however, is that most of Sir Hugh Calveley's alterations beautified Bunbury Church and remain visible at the present day.

To conclude, the real facts about Sir Hugh Calveley's birth, his supposed marriage and his burial remain unresolved, but trying to ascertain true facts is the life-blood of Family Historians.

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