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23 October 2023

Colyton Parish History Society Newsletter

. In this month's edition a brief report on my recent research trip to Jamestown, Virginia.

1. News

a) Visiting Jamestown – Following in the footsteps of Sir Thomas Gates

413 years ago in May 1610 Sir Thomas Gates sailed up the wide James River, a fresh wind blowing in his face, eagerly anticipating his arrival at Jamestown where he would finally assume the role of Governor in the fledgling British colony in Virginia. For Gates it would be the ultimate recognition of the success he had achieved in climbing the greasy career pole of Tudor and Stuart Society.

Jamestown from the James River

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Born into relatively humble circumstances in Colyton Parish in 1561, Gates had spent years as a mercenary soldier fighting for the Protestant cause in Europe. In 1585, under the command of Christopher Carleill, stepson of Sir Francis Walsingham, he had also sailed with him in Sir Francis Drake's American Armada and later had helped in the rescue of earlier colonists from the fated Roanoke colony. A decade later, then serving under the patronage of the Earl of Essex he participated in the successful attack on Cadiz in 1596, for which Essex knighted him, an honour subsequently confirmed by Queen Elizabeth I.

With the end of the Elizabethan era and the crowning of King James I in 1603 Gates entered a new phase of his career. A founding member of the Virginia Company, under the 1606 Charter he had been appointed Governor of Virginia (later Lieutenant Governor under Lord de la Warr.)

Gates, accompanied by Admiral of the Fleet, Sir George Somers the ageing and successful former privateer who was born in Lyme Regis, and Captain Christopher Newport finally departed England in 1609 aboard the *Sea Venture* at the head of a fleet of nine ships bearing hopeful new colonists and the third supply for the Jamestown settlement.

Contrary one might think to all sensible risk strategy, all three leaders and Gates' secret instructions from the Virginia Company for governing the Colony were aboard the *Sea Venture* which became separated from the rest of the fleet in a violent storm and was wrecked on Bermuda. It is thought the tale of the wrecking was later immortalized by Shakespeare in *The Tempest.*

Following their wrecking on the coral reefs of Bermuda, Gates had ordered the construction of two new ships the *Deliverance* and the *Patience* in which the survivors would sail on to Jamestown where he would take up the governorship. That mission was about to be accomplished.

As Gates approached the landing stage was he disconcerted by the apparent lack of any signs of life around the Fort? William Strachey, who had been appointed Secretary by the Virginia Company and had accompanied Gates on the *Sea Venture* and throughout the time on Bermuda wrote candidly of their first impressions:

> *"the three and twentieth of May, we cast anchor before James Town, where we landed, and our much grieved governor, first visiting the church, caused the bell to be rung, at which all such as were able to come forth of their houses repaired to church, where our minister, Master Bucke, made a zealous and sorrowful prayer, finding all things so contrary to our expectations, so full of misery and misgovernment. After*

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service, our governor caused me to read his commission, and Captain Percie, then president, delivered up unto him his commission, the old patent, and the council seal.

Viewing the fort, we found the palisadoes torn down, the ports open, the gates from off the hinges, and empty houses, which (the) owners' death had taken from them, rent up and burnt, rather than the dwellers would step into the woods a stone's cast off from them to fetch other firewood. And it is true the Indian killed as fast without, if our men stirred but beyond the bounds of their blockhouse, as famine and pestilence did within, with many more particularities of their sufferances brought upon them by their own disorders the last year than I have heart to express."

What must have been in his heart when Sir Thomas Gates realised that the dreadful condition of the starving colonists could not be helped with the small amount of fresh supplies they had brought with them from Bermuda and the burden of the additional souls who accompanied him? What fortitude and strength of character must it have taken for him and his counsellors to take the decision to abandon Jamestown and evacuate the remaining colonists?

Having done so and set sail for home, what film director could possibly have conceived the scenario of Lord de la Warr's mission bringing abundant new provisions and a fresh supply of colonists suddenly appearing on the river? Lord de la Warr assumed command and immediately ordered a return to Jamestown and appointed Sir Thomas Gates as his Lieutenant Governor. And so the story of the colony took another turn.

I have just returned from a week's visit to Jamestown where we were warmly received as guests of the State Government. John Dover, his wife Jan and I and another visitor - Peter Barrett from Bermuda - were given a personal tour of the historic site of Jamestown including the spot where Pochahontas and John Rolfe were married in the first church..

New archaeological discoveries are regularly being made on the site. Previous finds have included a signet ring which may possibly have belonged to William Strachey – it appears to bear his family crest and a halberd which again appears to bear the crest of the de la Warr family. Just days before we arrived Dave Givens the lead archaeologist had found the finely constructed hilt of a C17th sword down a well he is currently excavating.

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John Dover and me with Dave Givens, lead archaeologist at the Jamestown site

The site of the first church where Pocahontas and John Rolfe were married

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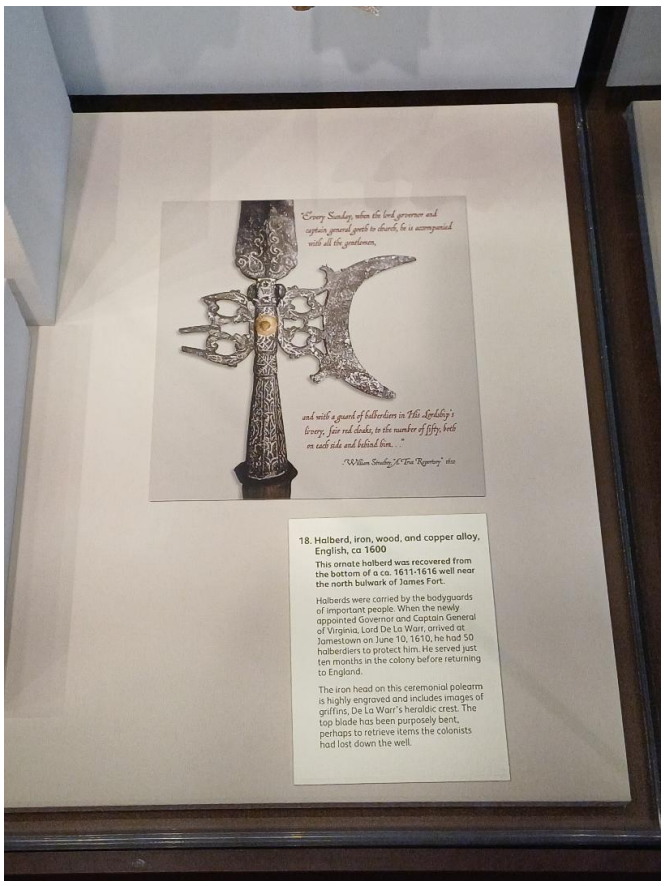

Halberd head bearing with Lord de la Warr's family crest

Photo from video capturing the moment when Dave Givens found sword hilt down a well

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From the streets of Williamsburg – note the crushed sea shells underfoot

We were also given a tour of the Archearium Museum on site and another day we visited the recreated settlement of Jamestown, the huge Museum they have there and the replicas of the *Susan Constant* and *Discovery* ships. Another day we toured Colonial Williamsburg and spent time talking with leading academics and archaeologists. It was fascinating and thought provoking.

Now I just have to finish my book!

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b) History Society talks

The talk on WEDNESDAY **25 October** is by Kay Townsend on ***'Fairgrounds at War 1939-45'*** and will be followed by a short AGM meeting. Tim White's Christmas Cards (£2) and Calendars (£10) will also be available to buy. Cash only please.

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2. **Other CPHS Matters**

a) **History Society talks – the last one of the year will be** on **22 November** Stewart Raine will talk about '***The History of Seaside Towns.'*** Talks are held in Colyton Town Hall and begin at 7.30 pm. Entrance fee: Members £2 and Non-Members £4.

3. **News items you may have missed**

a) Queen Victoria's rail carriage found rotting in a Devon field

Queen Victoria's royal carriage rots in a Devon field - Devon Live

b) Axminster Carpets recreate 250 year old work for Saltram

https://www.greatbritishlife.co.uk/lifestyle/23667012.axminster-carpets-recreate-250-year-old-work-saltram/?ref=eb&nid=2374&u=26e309a1465491fa9108b8530c3bc91f&date=151023

c) Pinemartins to return to Devon in future?

Could pinemartins be returning to Devon in the future? | Great British Life

d) Grade II listed house owned by Churchill family for 350 years goes on sale in Piddlehinton, Dorset

Grade II-listed manor house owned by the family of Winston Churchill for 350 years goes on the market for £2.5million (msn.com)

e) Gorgeous medieval home with grade I listed gardens up for sale in Dorset

https://www.countrylife.co.uk/property/a-gorgeous-medieval-home-in-dorset-with-grade-i-listed-gardens-are-up-for-sale-including-their-own-tea-room-and-gallery-260715

f) New way forward for Seaton Jurassic - Tramway

https://www.midweekherald.co.uk/news/23855565.new-way-forward-seaton-jurassic-tramway-takes/?ref=eb&nid=2397&u=26e309a1465491fa9108b8530c3bc91f&date=141023

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g) Did you realise how famous Ottery is?

OPINION: Did you ever realise how famous Ottery is? | Sidmouth Herald

h) Pictures of Dorset from the 1930s

https://www.bridportnews.co.uk/news/23842031.pictures-show-unspoilt-dorset-1930s/?ref=rss&IYA-mail=1ed933c3-0f6e-4168-8256-ab7a1bdc02a8

i) Critically endangered rodent found after disappearing from Devon a 1000 years ago

https://www.devonlive.com/news/devon-news/critically-endangered-rodent-found-river-8778300?utm_source=devon_live_newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Devon+Live+-+Western+Morning+News+Newsletter_newsletter&utm_content=&utm_term=&ruid=0f3b0370-2d82-4801-be9a-21ee0af0fd15

j) Revisiting Childhood – Sidmouth Museum

https://www.sidmouthherald.co.uk/news/23820985.review-revisiting-childhood-sidmouth-toy-model-museum/?ref=eb&nid=2405&u=26e309a1465491fa9108b8530c3bc91f&date=300923

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