

Sir Philip Sidney

Writing about Sir Philip Sidney is an indulgence as he was born the century after Richard. I have had a soft spot for him since I was a child because he invented the name Pamela! My brother is called Philip, but this was pure coincidence as he was named after the Duke of Edinburgh.

Dorothy Dunnett, one of my favourite authors, reminded of his existence. Then I discovered that I could trace his ancestry back to Richard's time! You'll also notice quite a few similarities between his life and Richard's.

Philip, a sickly child, was born on 30th November 1554 at Penshurst in Kent, the fourteenth century family home. One of the previous owners had been the Duke of Buckingham who was executed for rebelling against Richard III.

Though the family was Protestant he was named after the Catholic Spanish king. His father was Sir Henry Sidney and his mother Lady Mary Dudley. Soon Sir Henry's appointment as Lord President of the Council in the Marches meant it was practical to live at Ludlow Castle and Tickenhill Palace near Bewdley. Many new rooms were built at the castle and repairs undertaken, including repairs to Mortimer's Tower.

The council had authority over all Wales, Cheshire, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, Shropshire, and Worcestershire.

Philip went to Shrewsbury School, where one of his fellow pupils was Fulke Greville, son and heir of Sir Fulke Greville of Warwick, and a distant kinsman of the Dudleys. They became good friends.

In 1565 Philip's parents went to Ireland as his father had been appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland, though he also kept his position as Lord President of the Council in the Marches. Philip was heir

presumptive to his uncle Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, who was Elizabeth I's favourite.

His education continued at Oxford where his fellow students included Walter Raleigh, Richard Hakluyt who discovered America, Thomas Bodley who founded the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and William Camden, who became one of England's leading antiquarians and historians.

Several years were spent abroad in France, Germany, Poland and Italy in the company of diplomats and influential writers, artists and printers, before Queen Elizabeth recalled him to England to become one of her courtiers.

Philip's sister Ambrosia died at Ludlow Castle in 1575, and was buried in the parish church. Together with his other sister Mary, he was at Kenilworth Castle later that year when Elizabeth I arrived to stay with her favourite, as part of her progress round her realm. Philip had written one of the entertainments which were performed for the queen.

Two years later his sister married Henry Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke, whose London house was at Baynard's Castle. Philip's nephew William Herbert was born in 1580 at Wilton, and grew up to become patron of William Shakespeare.

Also in 1580 Philip completed 'The Arcadia', an epic romance in five books, which features a lady called Pamela. It was not published until 1590 after his death.

In January 1583 Philip was knighted by the queen, and later that year he finally got married, to Frances Walsingham, daughter of the queen's secretary of state. Many possible wives had been suggested before but nothing had happened. Their first daughter was born in November 1585 and named Elizabeth after the queen her godmother. Sir Philip was then Governor of Flushing in the Low Countries and so away from his wife and daughter, but considering getting them to move abroad to live with him.

Then in 1586 it all came to an end. First his father died in May in the Bishop's Palace in Worcester, from a chill caught while travelling

by boat from Bewdley to Worcester. The queen refused to allow Philip home for the funeral. Sir Henry's entrails were buried in the Dean's Chapel of Worcester Cathedral; his heart was buried in the parish church of Ludlow next to his daughter, and his body was buried at Penshurst in Kent. Frances joined Philip in Flushing at the end of June.

His mother died a few months later in August. She was already a semi-invalid and recluse when her husband died, and was buried next to him at Penshurst.

Philip was wounded in battle against the Spanish in October that same year and died from his injuries in Arnhem, aged thirty - one. He was buried in St Paul's Cathedral, though the grave has long since disappeared. A new plaque was erected in 1985.

His sister Mary co-ordinated the publication of his work, so that 'Arcadia' became known as 'The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia', and this prevented his talent being recognised for many years.

Fulke Greville wrote a life of Sidney, and was stabbed to death by a manservant in London in 1628. He is buried in St Mary's Church at Warwick, having been granted the castle by King James I in 1604. He spent a fortune on restoring it.

In an analysis of 'Arcadia', one of the characters is compared with Richard III, for all the wrong reasons of course! Plexirtus is the Machiavellian tyrant who seizes the crown by unjust means; seeks the death of his brother, following the precept that all who have any claim to the throne must be destroyed; and is crafty enough to hide his faults.

And Philip's ancestors back to Richard's time? When we visited Burford Church in Shropshire we saw the heart tomb of Edmund Cornwall Esquire who had married Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of Thomas Barr, a Herefordshire knight. They had a son named Thomas and a daughter called Eleanor. She married Sir Hugh Mortimer (killed at the battle of Wakefield and buried in Martley Church), and their daughter Elizabeth gave birth to a daughter who married Sir Edward Guildford. By him she gave birth to Ann who married the Duke of

Northumberland. One of their offspring was the Lady Mary, Philip's mother, and another his uncle, Robert Earl of Leicester.

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Sources:

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