

The Kayes of Woodsome

By George Redmonds

The Kayes of Woodsome were a Yorkshire gentry family whose main seat was a fine Elizabethan residence known as Woodsome Hall. It lay in its own extensive grounds just below the village of Farnley Tyas and it is little changed today. The family had moved there from Bury in Lancashire in the 1370s and were taxed at Farnley in 1379. John and Margaret Kay paid a 3s. 4d. “poll tax.” John was described as “Frankleyn” in the roll, and the title and the money he paid were sure signs of his status locally. His servants, John and Agnes, neither of them given a surname, were at the end of the township list, paying 4 pence each.¹

The family built up a considerable estate in the neighborhood for the next 350 years, but died out in the direct male line by 1726. Nevertheless, the surname remained prominent in the neighborhood of Farnley, and there are still many Kayes that reside there. Historically it had many variant spellings, but Kaye is now the conventional form locally with well over 200 Kaye families in the current telephone directory for Huddersfield, the nearest town. The interest New Englanders might have in the Kayes rests on the marriage between Grace Kaye and Sir Richard Saltonstall, the emigrant. This marriage took place on 28 November 1609 in the parish church of Almondbury, where the Kayes traditionally worshipped and where their first son Richard was baptised on 1 October 1610.²

Grace Kaye was the great granddaughter of Arthur Kaye, via his son John and grandson Robert, and it is Arthur who is credited with being the architect of the family’s fortunes. His name, alongside that of his wife Beatrix (*nee* Wentworth), still adorns the massive mantle beam at Woodsome, and yet there has always been a question mark over his inheritance of the estate. It should have passed to Nicholas, the ten-year-old grandson of an earlier John Kaye, whose inquisition post mortem took place in January of 1498-99.³ Sir William Dugdale’s *Visitation of Yorkshire* (W. Pollard & Co, Exeter, 1899-1917) named Nicholas as the son of Edward Kaye, who had pre-deceased his father. It was the death of Nicholas, in about 1506, which ensured the succession of his cousin Arthur, and documents kept at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library in Lawrence, Kansas, throw light on those tragic circumstances.

The first important document is a marriage settlement dated 3 August 1488. It records an agreement between John Kay, senior, and Matthew Wentworth of West Bretton, that “Nicholas Kay, son and heir to Edward Kay should take to wyfe Elizabeth doghtere of the seid Mathewe...the seid exsposelles to be hade...within the space of viij yeres next insuyng.” There then follows an interesting but complicated series of clauses dealing with the financial arrangements for the proposed marriage and the various properties on the estate. These include provisos about the maintenance of Nicholas and Elizabeth, which would be provided until he reached the age of sixteen. Lastly, provision was made “in case Elizabeth die, that Nicholas take another daughter of Mathewe Wyntworth.”⁴ As Nicholas was said to be ten years old when he was named heir in his grandfather’s inquisition of 1498-99, it is clear that the marriage agreement must have been drawn up almost immediately after his birth. This in turn means that his father Edward must have died just a short time before. There is little question that Edward’s unfortunate death explains the almost unseemly haste with which the infant Nicholas was betrothed to Elizabeth.

In 1504, the “mariage ... and the custodye of the body of the same Nicholas, and of the landes” were granted to Matthew Wentworth for forty marks by Sir James Strangeways, the Kayes’ overlord, “unto tyme that Nicholas shall come to his full age of xxj yere.”⁵ He was then just 16 years old and we know from his inquisition of 1506 that he must have died before he was 21. Nevertheless it seems that the marriage did take place, although no record of it appears to have survived. For confirmation of some of the unwritten events between the years of 1504-1506 we are indebted to an entry in the “Commonplace Book of John Kaye,” a document written by Arthur’s eldest son that is kept in the Folger Shakespeare Memorial Library in Washington D.C. In his later years, John wrote that his father “had the land in his hands about 50 years...and paid a feoffment of £6 13s. 4d. to Mrs. Arthington, *my mother’s sister*, during her life... before married to Nicholas Kay, heir male of this house who died under age.”⁶

That entry appears to confirm both the marriage and the death of Nicholas, but it proves also that John’s mother Beatrix was the sister of Elizabeth Wentworth, and therefore another of Matthew’s daughters, reminding us of how determined the two families had been in 1488 to secure their relationship. Nicholas’s premature death meant that Arthur had to secure the union, which he later commemorated so spectacularly over the hall fireplace. Arthur was the

son of George Kaye, a younger brother of Nicholas Kay's father Edward, and his given name offers us another insight into the Kaye-Wentworth relationship.

The name Arthur was not a popular one in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries but it was recorded often enough to give rise to the hereditary surnames Arthur and Arthurs. The name then dropped completely out of favor for over two hundred years, until Henry VII gave the name to his first-born son in 1486. Henry was a Welshman and his motive, as a disputed claimant to the English throne, was clearly to emphasize his links with the legendary King Arthur of the fifth or sixth century. At the same time, the choice seemed to fulfill the promise made to Cadwallader, the previous king of Britain, that his people should once again possess the land of their fathers. Arthur was to be the prince who united the red and white roses, putting an end to the long dynastic struggle, but when he died in 1502 at the age of 16, his younger brother Henry became Prince of Wales and was made heir to the throne, which he inherited in 1509.

The inference has always been that Arthur Kaye was named in honor of this prince, an opinion that appears to be supported by early versions of his pedigree. These comment on the Kayes' antiquity in Yorkshire and make the fabulous claim that the family descended from Sir Kay, King Arthur's seneschal and one of the knights of the Round Table.⁷ However, recent research throws new light on this question of Arthur's revival, confirming that gentry families in the neighborhood of Woodsome had reintroduced the name some time before Henry VII used it. Indeed, an adult Arthur Wentworth was the tenant of land in south Yorkshire as early as 1468, suggesting that he had been named around 1450 at the latest.⁸ It was the custom at that time for children to be named after a godparent, so when George Kaye's son took the name, perhaps in 1502, he may have "inherited" it from one of the Wentworths, as part of the alliance between the two families.

The direct male line of the Kayes became extinct in 1726 with the death of a later Sir Arthur. Arthur was by then a traditional family name in the neighborhood, largely through the Kayes' patronage. And, if we are left to wonder why the Wentworths had revived the name in the mid-1400s, we need only consider choices such as Troilus, Gawain, and Tristram made by other Yorkshire gentlemen in that period. No doubt their inspiration was the popular literature of the day and a desire to be associated with legendary heroes.

¹ Carolyn Fenwick, *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381, Pt. 1*, Oxford University Press, 1998

² The Parish Registers of Almondbury, Vol 2, 1598-1652, Yorkshire Archaeological Society

³ Sir William Dugdale, *Visitation of Yorkshire*, W. Pollard & Co, Exeter, 1899-1917

⁴ Marriage Settlement, August 3, 1488, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, Lawrence, KS

⁵ Grant of Custody, August 2, 1504, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, Lawrence, KS.

⁶ John Kaye, "Commonplace Book of John Kaye," document kept in the Folger Shakespeare Memorial Library, Washington D.C.

⁷ An example of such a claim could be found in a pedigree by Barritt in the Chetham Library in Manchester, according to C.A. Hulbert in his *Annals of the Church of Almondbury*, London, 1882

⁸ J.W. Walker, "Chartularies of Monk Bretton Priory," Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series, Vol. 66, 1924