

A brief history of the Holts inhabiting Stubley Hall near Littleborough and Castleton Hall, south of Rochdale, for nearly three centuries

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The name of Geoffrey de Holt first appears in the Rochdale area in the reign of Edward III and it is around this time that the name of Holt generally begins to appear in Lancashire records. Though the name of Holt was quite common in the county, meaning of the Forest, it is noticeable that many Holts in parts of Lancashire – Lancaster, Billings, Stubley, Gristlehurst, Bridge Hall and Ashworth – as well as in Cambridge, Oxford, Suffolk and Hampshire – appear to share a similar coat of arms – Ar. On a bend sa., three fleur-de-lys.

It is believed that Thomas Holt was a descendant of Geoffrey; another descendant was William Holt of Whitewall and probably a Robert ... "Edward Holt of Sale, Cheshire, whose lands his ancestor for James Holt, son of Robert, base son of Geoffrey de Holt, had in marriage with Ellen, daughter and heir of Thomas Sale of Sale in 1397, sold land in 1604 to the Lords Delamere of Dunham Massey when they also purchased land of Thomas Holt of Whickleswick and of Randle Holt, son of Thomas."

Thomas Holt of the Rochdale area dies in 1494 and his heir, Robert, then aged 13, inherited in Hundersfield, Rochdale, 15 houses and 300 acres of Land. Robert prospered, became a J.P. and lived at Stubley, where he built a new house. When he died in 1554, another Robert, his nephew, inherited but did not live more than two years more; this Robert died in 1556 and his will states that he held in Hundersfield, Spotland, Castleton, Bury, Middleton and Tottington, 80 houses, 3 water mills, 4 fulling mills and 4000 acres of land. He had no sons but several unmarried daughters, so he left his lands to another branch of the Holt family, Robert, son of William Holt of Whitewall, and to this Robert's son, Charles, he left Stubley Hall and its lands, on condition that Charles married one of the unmarried daughters, Mary, so uniting two branches of the original Geoffrey de Holt's line.

Stubley Hall at this time was described as being "an ancient manor with stables, barns, dove-cotes, water mill and 110 acres of land around it" and Charles Holt also acquired by inheritance Castleton Hall, south of Rochdale, "a fayre mansion house built with freestone, with stables, oxehouse and dovehouse, also gardens, orchards and courts." He added to his lands in 1560 by enclosing two-thirds of the waste land of Castleton common and when he died in 1592, he owned 90 houses in Rochdale alone. He left everything to his eldest son, John, who lived mainly at Castleton – one of the Holts had originally settled here in 1500 and deed dated 1523 in Henry VIII's reign, there is mention of Adam Holt, gentleman, of Castleton.

John Holt died at Castleton in 1622 and the properties passed to his son, Robert. Robert was 20 when his father died and he also acquired various estates by inheritance from other Holts. He played a prominent part in the Civil war in Lancashire. He was already a much respected J.P. and Deputy Lieutenant of the County in 1636, and in 1640 he became High Sheriff of Lancashire. It would appear that the Holts close ties with the Earls of Derby had remained since the days when they were the Royal House of Lancaster and Robert Holt was obviously close to Lord Strange, the son and heir. With Lord Strange, he attended a banquet in Manchester at a time when both King and Parliament were trying to persuade the citizens of Manchester to hand over large stocks of ammunition and guns they had collected for self-protection in the event of civil war. The parliamentarians gave orders that at all costs Lord Strange was not to get his hands on the weapons and knowing that Lord Strange had recommended Robert Holt as the man "most proper to have charge of the powder magazines in Manchester", they advanced on Manchester with their troops on hearing of the banquet, Lord Strange, Robert Holt, Piers Legh and others present called up their men also and in the fighting – which was the first real fighting of the Civil War – Lord Strange was injured.

Parliament took action when it was obvious that Robert Holt was supporting the King and removed him as J.P. and High Sheriff in 1642, but Lord Strange countered this by appointing

him to collect money for the Royalist cause and to other responsibilities in Lancashire. Lord Strange – who was such a fanatical Royalist that even the King began to suspect his motives. – succeeded his father and went on to fight all through the Civil War; his eventual end was a trail in Chester and he was executed in Bolton. But it does not appear that Robert Holt left Stubble for a long during those years – maybe he felt that Lord Strange was too fanatical , too involved; maybe he too was wounded and had to give up the fight.

In any event, Cromwell fined Robert Holt £150 and Richard Holt of Ashurst £500 for their part in the war, in 1646, and he also took part of their lands as punishment. But Robert lived on at Stubble and Castleton and married twice. His first wife , Mary was daughter of Sir Robert Bindloss of Borwick, Lancs. They had a son and a daughter, though only the daughter , Dorothy, survived.

This daughter , Dorothy, from his first marriage , married John Entwisle of Foxholes in Rochdale , Barrister of the Middle Temple and Recorder of Liverpool. One of their sons, Bertin, was Vice-Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and another, Edmund , was Dean of Chester. Edmund Entwistle married twice, first to a daughter of Nicholas Stratford, Bishop of Chester and then to a daughter of Sir Thomas Bunbury of Bunbury, Cheshire.

Then Robert Holt married Catherine , eldest daughter of John Bullock of Darly in Derbyshire, and they had ten children, though again most of these did not survive their first year. This was a time of great famine in Cheshire and Lancashire due to heavy floods and poor harvests, as well as death through the plague. But Robert lived on, held a colonelcy in one of the militia regiments after the Restoration and eventually dies and was buried in Rochdale in 1673 at the age of 71.

His eldest son, from his father, in 1676, without children and the estates passed to the second son James, who was a Fellow of Brazenose College, Oxford. James married Dorothy, daughter of Thomas Goltho of Granham, Lincs. And appears to have lived in York where he died in 1712, though his wife survived him and founded a Charity in his name.

They had four daughters, but no sons. Frances, their eldest, married James Winstanley of Branston House, Leicester, a barrister. Elizabeth married William Cavendish of Doveridge House in Yorks. Isabella, their third daughter ,was first the wife of Delavel Dutton and then married Sir William Parsons of Langley, Bucks. Mary, the youngest, married Samuel Chetham of Turton Tower, Bolton. Samuel was a member of the chetham family, founders of the Bluecoat School in Manchester and the Chetham Charities in that city.

Samuel, having acquired his wife's portion of the Holt estates through marriage , went on to buy those of her three sisters and his mother in law, Dorothy Holt, though he took care that Dorothy should continue to live on Holt property. He rebuilt Castleton Hall in 1719 but he and his wife Mary had no children, so the estates went to his brother Humphrey Chetham in 1744 and Humphrey in turn left them back into the Holt family on his death, when they went to James Winstanley, eldest son on James Winstanley and Frances nee Holt. In 1772, Clement, son of James, sold Castleton Hall to local merchants, the Walmsley family, while Stubble Hall went to outside buyers some years later, and that was the end of the Holt connection with Stubble Hall and Castleton Hall after nearly three centuries.