

Why did an English “investment club” establish the Saybrook Colony? (Part I)

(By Lamar LeMonte, OSHS December, 2021)

Who were Lord Saye and Sele and Lord Brooke and why were they handing out land grants at the end of a river in a land on which they would never set foot?



*William Fiennes (1582-1662, 80 yrs.)
8th Baron and 1st Viscount Saye and Sele*



*Robert Greville, (1607-1643, 36 yrs.)
2nd Baron Brooke*

Who were these two men?

Englishman William Fiennes, a wealthy Viscount and his young political associate, Robert Greville, a wealthy Baron, were land investors and political activists of the 1600s. They were both Puritans and members of a political opposition faction called Parliamentarians. They were protesting the absolute rule and prerogatives of their king, Charles I, and his fellow Royalists. It was a perilous time in England to be sparring with a monarch holding absolute power. Their protests got them both imprisoned for a time, and later got young Baron Brooke shot to death by a Royalist sniper at the age of 36. Fear for their lives at times was very real and the Saybrook Colony played a role in that fear, as a potential safe political refuge for them and their fellow land investors. But first it was a for-profit land investment.

Both men were savvy politicians and clever investors in numerous profit-making schemes of the decade. They, like many of their fellow lords in Parliament, along with wealthy English merchants, were eager to find new colonial investment opportunities. They established companies to trade in various parts of the world. Each company was made up of investors, known as "adventurers", who purchased shares of company stock. Parliament granted a charter to each company with a monopoly to explore, settle, or trade with a particular region of the world. Profits were shared among the investors according to the amount of stock that each owned. More than 6,300 Englishmen invested in joint-stock companies between 1585 and 1630, trading in Russia, Turkey, Africa, the East Indies, the Mediterranean, Caribbean and most especially North America.

Their Saybrook connection

The popular legend about the town's name is that it honors Viscount Saye and Sele and Lord Brooke. The story is that in the early 1630's these two Englishmen granted a group of English Puritans the legal right to establish a colony at the end of the Connecticut River. John Winthrop Jr. or the Younger, was their employee. His father, John Winthrop the Elder, was at that time the Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Younger sailed from Boston to the end of the Connecticut River in 1636 to establish the colony that he reportedly named Saye-Brooke, to honor his two employers. There is some irony in the Saye-Brooke naming legend since the two honorees ultimately rejected New England, reneged on their promises of on-going support for Saye-Brooke, and never set foot in the Colonies.



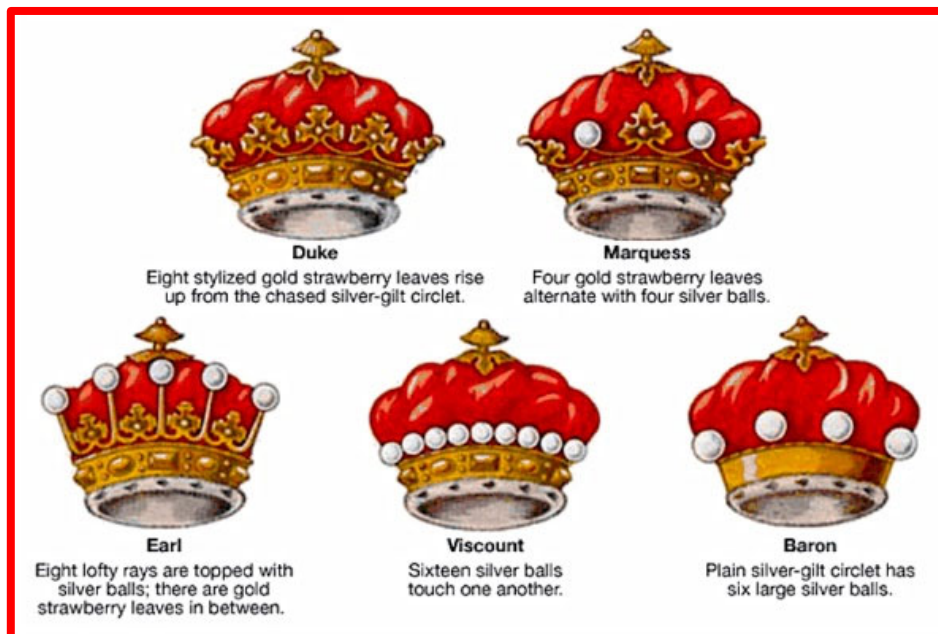
Portrait of John Winthrop Jr. in the Old Saybrook Historical Society's Hart House. Painted by Marek Sarba, Society member and noted local artist.

Some historians claim the original name was actually Seabrook or Zeebroeck (Dutch spelling) and had nothing to do with the two Englishmen. But an English historian claims the town was first named in their honor and later renamed Seabrook. Regardless of the name-origin debate, there is no debate about the direct involvement of the “investment club” headed by the Viscount and the Baron. They employed John Winthrop Jr. to establish the Saybrook Colony.

What about their names and titles?

Their correct titles were the 8th Baron and later, the 1st Viscount Saye and Sele, and the 2nd Baron Brooke. Many Americans find their elaborate titles confusing. In their day both men would have been addressed as Lord Saye and Sele and Lord Brooke, while their actual names were William Fiennes and Robert Greville. British peerage is a famously complex title system. Some pundits are convinced that only the English and perhaps the script writers for *Downton Abbey* and *The Crown* fully comprehend it. Most Americans require textbooks to begin to understand it, much less appreciate its legal and political subtleties.

The five peerage titles ranked by “gradations of honour,” are: duke/dutchess; marquess/marchioness; earl/countess; viscount/viscountess; and baron/baroness. The origins and significance of many of these titles are from early Anglo-Saxon institutions plus the nobles of Scotland and Ireland, and even early land demarcations. For instance, English shires or counties were grouped into earldoms, each led by an earl.



The life of William Fiennes, 8th Baron and 1st Viscount Saye and Sele (1582-1662)

The name Fiennes (pronounced “fines”) is of French heritage. William was born in Broughton Castle and became the 8th Baron Saye and Sele. He reportedly also died in the castle, at the age of 80. In 1624 at age 42, he was made a Viscount. Peerage titles commonly used surnames or place names. His title using Saye and Sele is a compound-peerage name created from two place names. Saye was possibly a village in Normandy and a Lord *de Saye* (from Saye) reportedly took part in the Norman invasion of England. The Sele name was thought to be derived from land owned at Seal, a village in the Sevenoaks district of Kent. The Saye and Sele Barony was created in 1447 by Henry VI.



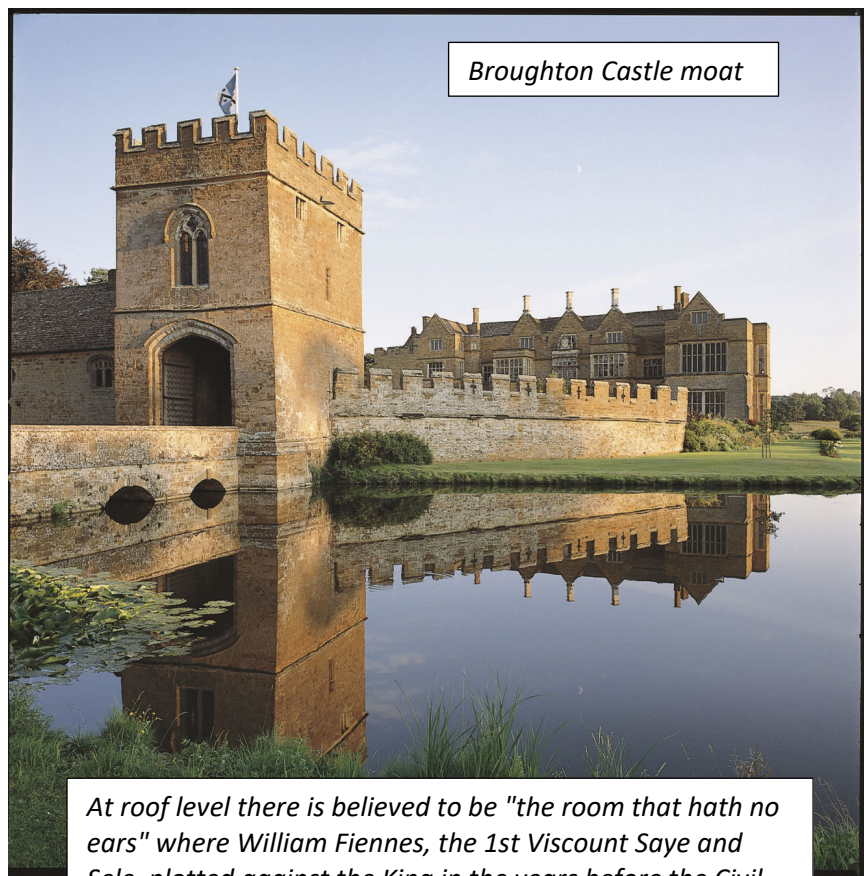
William Fiennes was born in Broughton Castle in 1613, the ancestral home of the Saye and Sele Barony. He was the 8th Baron Saye and Sele. The castle has been in continuous ownership of the same family since 1377. He was made the 1st Viscount in 1624 under King James I. On the death of the 6th Viscount in 1781 there were no more male heirs and the viscount title became extinct. Thereafter titles reverted back to baron. The Barony continues today with the 21st Lord and Lady Saye and Sele, who currently occupy Broughton Castle.

Fiennes was a member of Parliament, specifically the House of Lords, the “upper” house. Membership was made up of the Lords Spiritual (two Archbishops, 24 Diocesan Bishops) and the Lords Temporal, who were hereditary peers, and peers granted peerages by the king. These dukes, marquesses, viscounts, earls and barons constituted one of the most expansive “investment clubs” in history.

As a member of Parliament William Fiennes was no stranger to the sometimes perilous life of English politicians. His ancestor, James Fiennes, the 1st Baron Saye and Sele, was Lord Chamberlain (the senior officer of the Royal Household) and Lord Treasurer under Henry VI, and he was beheaded.

Fiennes was an ardent investor. Members of his de facto investment club included, among others, his young friend and fellow political activist, Robert Greville, who was the 2nd Baron Brooke, plus other similar aristocratic, wealthy, noble peers or "Lords and Gentlemen." Their most prominent associate in Parliament was Oliver Cromwell, the eventual leader of the armies against King Charles I and the future post-civil-war ruler of England. Next most prominent associate was Cromwell's friend, Robert Rich, the 4th Baron Rich who became the 2nd Earl of Warwick in 1619 and the commander of the Parliamentary Navy during the civil war.

Before becoming Commanding Admiral, Rich was the colonial administrator of the existing Virginia company and the Plymouth company, Royal charters granted by King James I in 1606. He was also involved in the Guinea company in Africa and their slave trade, as well as the Somers Isles company, which was Bermuda, the Guiana company in the Caribbean where no gold was found, and the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the New Haven Colony.



Broughton Castle moat

At roof level there is believed to be "the room that hath no ears" where William Fiennes, the 1st Viscount Saye and Sele, plotted against the King in the years before the Civil War. He met with his Parliamentary co-conspirators Robert Greville, the 2nd Lord Brooke, Robert Rich, the 2nd Earl of Warwick and possibly even Oliver Cromwell. Very likely their Colonial land investments were also discussed, with John Winthrop Jr. and George Fenwick in the room.

Working-class Englishmen including entire families willing to emigrate were needed for these investments to pay off for investors. Mostly men were recruited to establish commercial operations like tobacco, rice and cotton farming in the Virginia Colony. But in what would become New England, mostly families were recruited to establish religious colonies along the northern coast. Longer term, the success of these religious colonies would not only generate increased trading opportunities for the investors, but also possibly a safe political refuge for the investors, in case the politics of a reigning king turned perilous for the lords.

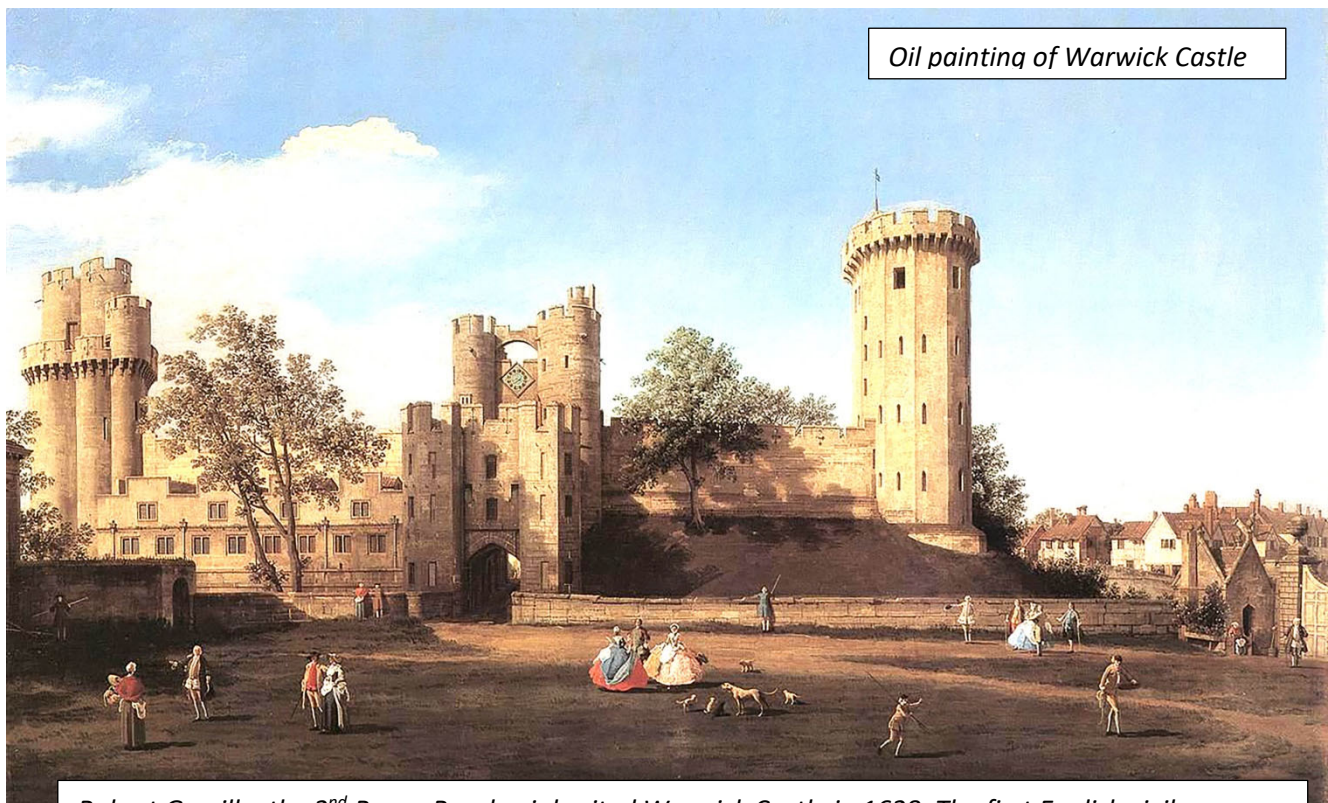
Robert Rich, the 2nd Earl of Warwick was a key player in Saybrook history because it was he who in 1631 procured a curious patent for a colony in Connecticut, variously called the Warwick Patent, the Old Patent, the Connecticut Patent or the Saybrook Patent. It was curious because that original document has never been found. Some historians continue to claim the actual Warwick Patent to be non-existent. What was discovered by historians was neither a charter from the king nor a patent from the Council for New England and included no provisions for the creation of a corporation or a government with legal status. Historians simply found a deed of conveyance from Warwick to certain "Lords and Gentlemen," including Lord Saye and Sele and Lord Brooke, for *"All that part of New England in America which lies and extends itselfe from a River there called Narraghensett River ... to the South Sea."* It remains unclear even today whether Warwick actually had title to the land described or the authority to transfer it to the "investment club" headed by Lord Saye and Sele and Lord Brooke.



Robert Rich, the 4th Baron Rich and later the 2nd Earl of Warwick

The Life of Robert Greville, 2nd Baron Brooke (1607-1643)

Robert Greville was the only surviving son of Fulke Greville, “an obscure Linchonshire squire.” Greville’s life was transformed when he was adopted at the age of four by his childless distant cousin, another Fulke Greville, but this one titled the 1st Baron Brooke. Robert then became the 2nd Baron Brooke, which ultimately allowed him to sit in the House of Lords in Parliament. When the 1st Baron Brooke was murdered (by his manservant over provisions in Greville’s will) in 1628, Robert also inherited Brooke’s home, the famous Warwick Castle. This is interesting because the castle had always been home to the Earls of Warwick since 1088. But the English monarchs decided to split the title of Earl of Warwick from ownership of the castle and in 1604, King James I gave the castle to Sir Fulke Greville, the 1st Baron Brooke.



Robert Greville, the 2nd Baron Brooke, inherited Warwick Castle in 1628. The first English civil war began in 1642 and Greville, a Parliamentarian, began recruiting men and securing weapons at Warwick Castle. The King’s Royalists unsuccessfully attacked the castle in 1642 and it remained a garrison throughout all three civil wars, from 1643-1660 with as many as 300 soldiers. Greville became a Parliamentary commander and his regiment fought several skirmishes with Royalists. He was shot and killed by a Royalist sniper in 1643 and was buried in the Collegiate Church of St. Mary, Warwick, England. He was 36 years old. In 1660 the castle was given back to the family, another Robert Greville, now the 4th Baron Brooke. The Greville family continued to own the castle until 1978.

Later when Robert Greville, 2nd Baron Brooke, meets Robert Rich, 4th Baron Rich and then the 2nd Earl of Warwick, to discuss the Warwick Patent, one has to wonder if there was conversation about Warwick Castle, the ancestral home of the Rich family. The Rich barony never re-inhabited their castle. In 1759 the 8th Baron Brooke was bestowed with the title Earl of Warwick, and the castle was back in the hands of the Earls of Warwick. But they were the Greville family barony, not the Rich family barony, and the Greville family held ownership until 1978, when they sold the castle to the Madame Tussaud wax-museum group.



Warwick Castle on the River Avon

Robert Greville was well-educated and a prolific writer, publishing several books on educational reform and religious tolerance. He was 26 years younger than William Fiennes, and the elder Lord became his mentor, not only in Parliament but also in investing. They were kindred political spirits, both labeled Puritans and Parliamentarians, both troubled by the disregard their King Charles I had for the Parliament, which he ultimately dismissed so his rule would be unconstrained.

As English civil war clouds grew more ominous in the 1630s, both Greville and Fiennes seriously contemplated emigration, along with other political opposition leaders and investors like Oliver Cromwell and Robert Rich, who had just given them the Warwick Patent for establishing Saybrook. But there were two other investments that preceded Saybrook that held greater interest for them all. One was the Providence Island Company in the Caribbean, and the other was the Cochecho Plantation in what is now Dover, New Hampshire.

Read Part II of **Why did an English “investment club” establish the Saybrook Colony?**

Learn more about the two other investments that preceded Saybrook that held more interest and greater potential for profits. One was the Providence Island Company in the Caribbean, the other was the Cochecho Plantation in what is now Dover, New Hampshire. Read why Saybrook was abandoned by the investors.

Read why all of the investors stayed in England to fight their civil war. What happened to them after the war, especially Lord Saye and Sele, who outlived them all, living in exile on his private island in the Bristol Channel?

Fun Facts:

Ralph Fiennes, British film and stage actor best known for his performances in the films *Schindler's List*, *The English Patient* and the *Harry Potter* franchise, is related to the Saye and Sele Barony. He currently stars as “M” in the latest James Bond film, *No Time To Die*.



Broughton Castle, the ancestral home of the Sale and Sele Barony, has been the scene for many movies and television shows, most recently, the television series *The Crown*. The castle also appeared in *The Slipper and the Rose*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *Three Men and a Little Lady*, *The Madness of King*

George, *Shakespeare in Love*, *Jane Eyre*, *Friends* and *Crocodiles*, and *Oxford Blues*.

The 21st Lord and Lady Saye and Sele continue to occupy the castle today. Baron Nathaniel Fiennes is 101 years old. In 1985, (the town's 350th anniversary) the Lord and Lady along with their son, Martin Fiennes, visited, among many others, Katharine Hepburn.



*(Below) Warwick Castle today,
open to the public for tours and numerous public events*

