

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

(By Lamar LeMonte, OSHS January, 2022)

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 Robert Greville 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. The Saybrook settlement was their only land investment not made for profit, but rather for political exile.



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



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

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

The Providence Island Company 1630

Robert Greville, William Fiennes, Oliver Cromwell, Robert Rich and other fellow investors were convinced that a small island off the coast of Nicaragua named Providencia would be far more enticing to working-class English emigrants than the cold and foreboding climes and rocky shores of New England. Based on the successful cash crops of the Virginia Company, they envisioned tobacco, sugar cane and cotton would finance the Providencia investment profits. Historians claim this investment was for years their primary interest, not New England.

The investors were also aware that Providencia Island occupied an unrivalled position from which to harass the trade routes of Spanish galleons laden with wealth from the New World, in other words, a lucrative position for sanctioned piracy on behalf of the English. The investment group got as many as 500 English settlers onto the island but the investment was a failure and the Spanish took control of the island in 1641. The investors never visited the island.



The Cocheco "Plantation," Dover, New Hampshire 1633

"Plantation" was the English name for a colonial settlement. In 1623 William Hilton and brother, Edward, settled the Cocheco Plantation, an Indian name from the Abenaki tribe. The land later became Dover, New Hampshire. They established a profitable fish factory on the Piscataqua River which today forms the boundary between New Hampshire and Maine. (William Hilton's son, also named William, was a sea captain and would later name Hilton Head Island, SC)

In 1633 the plantation and profitable fishery were purchased by Fiennes, Greville, Cromwell, Rich and other investors. The settlement was first named Bristol and then in 1637 it was renamed Dover. Their purchase demanded the establishment of an emigrant hereditary aristocracy from which governors would be chosen from their fellow peers. The hereditary aristocracy notion was never well received by the early settlers there, most of whom had recently fled just such a state. As in investment, this one was also abandoned and turned over to the Massachusetts Bay Company. Historians claim the investors were mainly interested in the Dover fish factory profits, but they never visited the settlement. Some historians believe the investors seriously contemplated emigrating, until the hereditary aristocracy was deemed undesirable by the locals.



The Saybrook Colony 1635 (their third investment option)

The investors knew the Dutch were already profiting from the lucrative fur trade coming down the Connecticut River. But by 1635, political safety, not profit, was the primary motivation for establishing Saybrook. This was unlike Cochecho and Providencia, where profits were the first objective of the investors, not safe exile.

With the authorization of Robert Rich's generous Warrick Patent, the investors hired John Winthrop Jr. to administrate the work of establishing a settlement at the end of the Connecticut River. What they paid him is not known. They also hired and financed Lion Gardiner and his fellow associates to help build the fortification there. Later, as the English civil war clouds continued to grow, the investors allowed George Fenwick to take over the Saybrook settlement. George Fenwick's wife was "Lady" Fenwick but George was not an English noble so he was never Lord Fenwick. She inherited that title from her first husband, a nobleman. Fenwick was however an aristocrat and "a lawyer turned adventurer" and later a member of parliament. Not much is recorded about Fenwick's relationship to the original Saybrook investors, but he was probably more closely aligned with John Winthrop Jr. as an employee, rather than a principal investor. The new settlement was given to him but without any further investor support.

He certainly accumulated a considerable amount of Connecticut land and wealth as leader of the settlement, and perhaps that was one of his incentives for taking over the administration of the settlement. But by that time, the investors had decided to cancel their plans to emigrate and they never followed Fenwick to Saybrook. They stayed in England to fight their civil war. Like Providentia and Cochecho, financial support from the investors ended. Ultimately unfunded, Fenwick sold the Saybrook Colony to the larger and more prosperous Connecticut Colony upriver in 1644 and after the death of Lady Fenwick he returned to England. He fought in the English civil war with Oliver Cromwell and other fellow colonial investors, obtaining the rank of colonel.



Lady Fenwick's tomb in Cypress Cemetery, which was laid out in 1635 as the Saybrook Colony's burial ground.

They all stayed in England to fight their civil war

The noble lords and Parliamentary investors never came to Saybrook. They ultimately won their war in England, defeated the Royalists, arrested, tried and in 1649, beheaded their King Charles I.

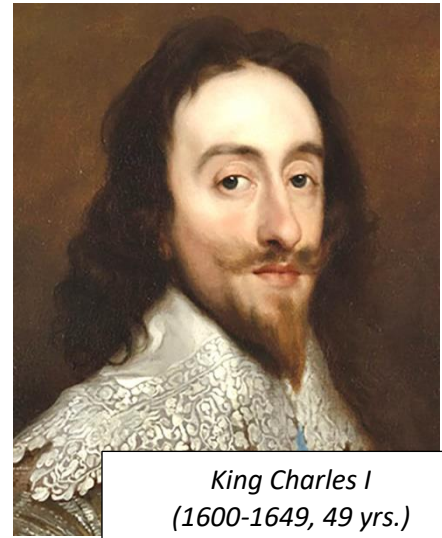
General Oliver Cromwell became the ruler of The British Isles as Lord Protector until his death in 1658, age 59. Admiral Robert Rich, the 2nd Earl of Warwick, kept investing and incorporated the new Providence Plantation, this time in Rhode Island, not the Caribbean, and increased his land holdings in both



*Oliver Cromwell
(1599-1658, 59 yrs.)*

Virginia and Bermuda. He retired from the House of Lords after the execution of King Charles I and also died in 1658, age 71. Robert Greville, the 2nd Baron Brooke, saved his Warwick Castle from attack by Royalists, but lost his life from Royalist sniper fire at the early age of 36. William Fiennes, the 1st Viscount Saye and Sele, lost his Broughton castle in 1642 to the Royalists, but unlike his young investment protégé Greville, he did not lose his life.

At the outbreak of the civil war, Fiennes gained the rank of colonel in the service of the Parliamentary foot regiment and raised troops to fight the king. His four sons were also soldiers. Unlike his protégé Brooke, his Broughton Castle was besieged by Royalist troops who occupied it for some time. At the end of the war, reconstruction work was undertaken to repair damage inflicted by the Royalists. He reportedly died there at the age of 80. Before then he was in self-exile on Lundy Island in the Bristol Channel.



*King Charles I
(1600-1649, 49 yrs.)*



*Robert Rich, 2nd Earl of Warwick
(1587-1658, 71 yrs.)*

Early in the civil war, William's son, Richard Fiennes, was in charge of the Parliamentary garrison of Bristol. Lundy Island is ten miles off the coast in the Bristol Channel. It is a narrow island just 3 miles long. It had been a Royalist stronghold until Richard Fiennes forced the surrender of the island to the Parliamentarians in 1647. Nine years later in 1656, his father William Fiennes, the 1st Viscount Saye and Sele, acquired the island for himself and lived there in exile, perhaps for very good reason.



King Charles II (1630-1685, 55 yrs.)

The son of beheaded King Charles I was restored to the monarchy in 1660 after Cromwell's reign. King Charles II sought retribution for his father's execution. He started with Cromwell's two year old grave, dug him up, cut off his head, and displayed it on a public spike. Those noble Parliamentarians still living who signed his father's death warrant were sought. Several of them had escaped to the New Haven Colony. But William Fiennes never signed the death warrant and was able to make peace with the new king after his restoration to the throne in 1660. Perhaps this was when William Fiennes returned from exile to his restored Broughton Castle, dying shortly thereafter in 1662 at the age of 80, having outlived Cromwell, Rich, Brooke, and Fenwick, who died five years earlier.

The choice to exile on Lundy Island by William Fiennes had a Greville family connection. From the 1500s the Greville family had owned the island, first by Sir Richard Greville, then the son, Sir Bernard Greville, and by 1619 by his son, Sir Bevil Greville, who was killed in the civil war in 1643. Richard Fiennes, one of William's four sons, captured Lundy from Royalist forces in 1647. Nine years later in 1657 William Fiennes, 1st Viscount Saye and Sele, purchased the island for his temporary exile from the mainland.



The age was over for English investment companies and their exploitation of colonial land profits. By the 1660s, the new King Charles II was contemplating re-writing all those old investment company land grants and charters that the Colonies were living under. It turns out they were good investments after all and the king felt he was losing control of some of the Colonies and not getting from them his royal fair share of their proceeds. At the same time, Connecticut Colony governor John Winthrop Jr. realized that his colony lacked any firm legal foundation in England, due to the curious origins of the Warwick Patent.

There was real fear in Hartford that Charles II would want absolute control over the entire Connecticut Colony. So twenty-six years after Viscount Saye and Sele and Lord Brooke had sent him to establish Saye-Brooke, John Winthrop Jr. sailed back to England to secure a new “legitimate” charter from the King. In 1661 he first met with his old patron William Fiennes, the aging Lord Saye and Sele, for negotiating advice and counsel. They presumably met at Broughton Castle. Of all the original Saybrook investors, he was the only one still living. Fiennes was 79 years old and would die the next year. Winthrop was 55 years old and would live another 15 years, dying in Boston in 1676, age 70, having successfully gained from King Charles II a new, and this time, “Royal” charter for Connecticut.

Winthrop came home to Connecticut with an amazing document. It was a 1662 charter not unlike some of the earlier English investment company charters, except that this time the investors were not wealthy English Lords and merchant “adventurers.” This time the investors were “the freemen of Connecticut,” and they were given the right to “freely lease, grant, sell, bargain, alienate, and dispose of property” as other corporations had the right to do. The Charter provided for a governor, deputy-governor and 12 assistants, all of whom were to be elected annually by the freemen of the company. An Assembly consisting of not more than two representatives from each town elected by the freemen was to meet twice annually to act upon the business of the corporation. The Colony was forbidden to enact laws contrary to those of England. In return, the King was to receive one-fifth of all gold and silver mined in the Colony. Winthrop reasoned this to be a fair bargain. The boundaries of the Colony extended from Greenwich to the Narragansett Bay, and west to the “South Sea,” which turned out to be the Pacific Ocean. The Charter of 1662 basically ruled Connecticut until 1818 and it is the legendary document the Colonists hid in the “Charter Oak” so the king’s royal representative could not seize it and return it to King James II in 1687.

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.





Other views:

(Left) Broughton Castle today, open to the public and the occasional television and film production crews

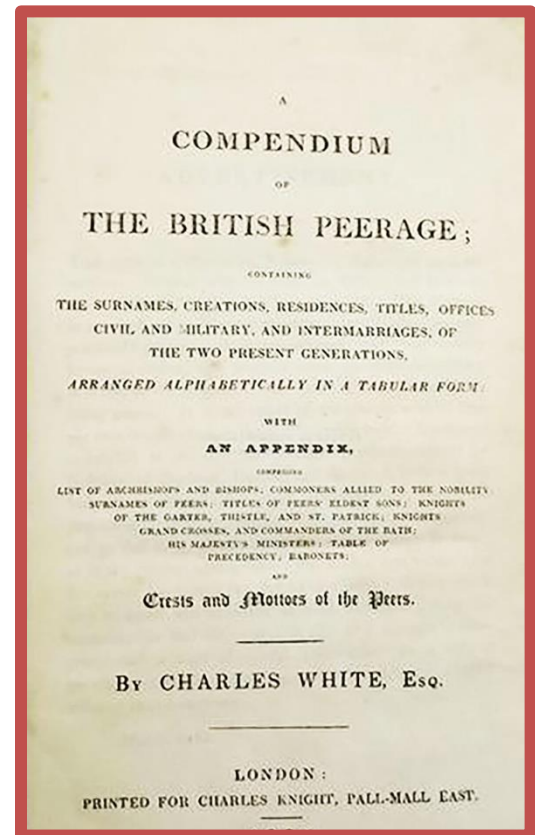
(Below) Warwick Castle today, open to the public for tours and numerous public events



(Left) Lundy Island today, open to the public for day tours and vacation visits

English ranks and titles can be royal titles or noble titles. Some are inherited and some are bestowed by the monarch. They can be further complicated by whether their origins are English, Irish, or Scottish.

Early English kings appointed their sons dukes. They also created marquesses and viscounts, ranks above and below that of earl. The lowest ranking barons were originally holders of feudal lands as direct tenants of their king. Many early titles denoted who got called by a king to fight his current war. Other titles denoted which lord was invited to sit in parliament and hold administrative power backed by the king and his treasury. Peerage titles ultimately got expanded to include female monarchs, and then wives and daughters. Nobles below the rank of duke were addressed as “sir” or “lord.”



The English Peerage system is still a complex legal system comprising various Hereditary titles, Baronage titles, Life Peer titles, and Representative Peer titles. There are privileges belonging to English peerage that are distinct from Parliamentary privileges. The hereditary, political and legal complexities of the system have kept English barristers in business for many centuries.



© Copyright 2022 Old Saybrook Historical Society. All rights reserved.
This content may not be reproduced or posted without permission from the OSHS