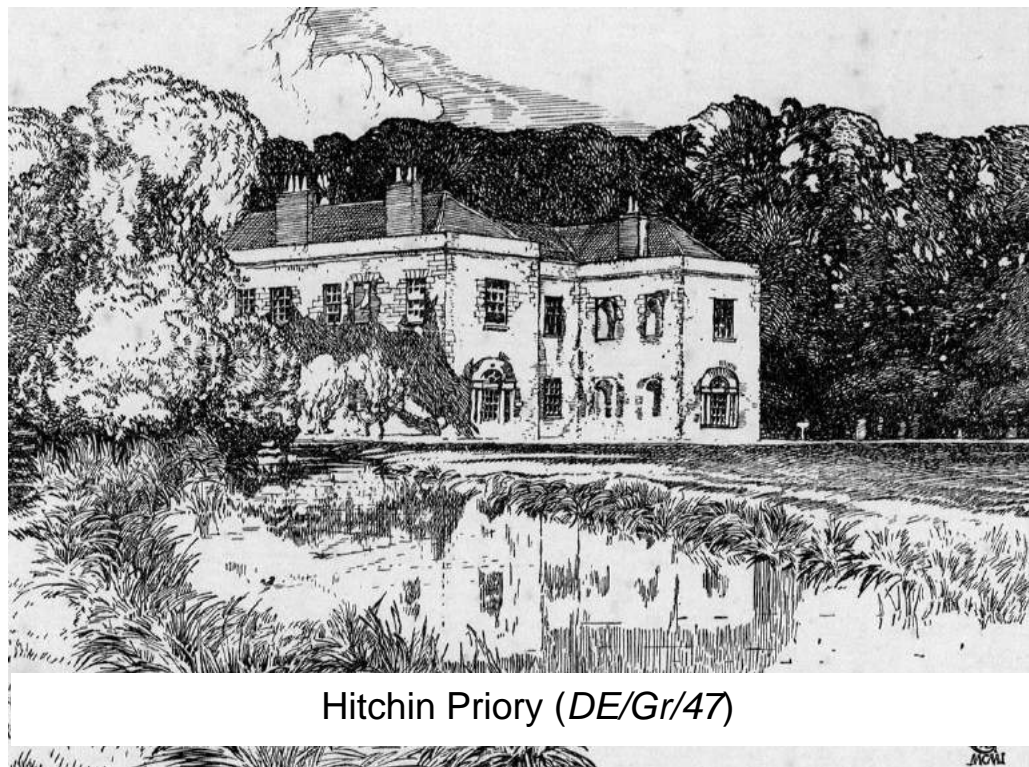
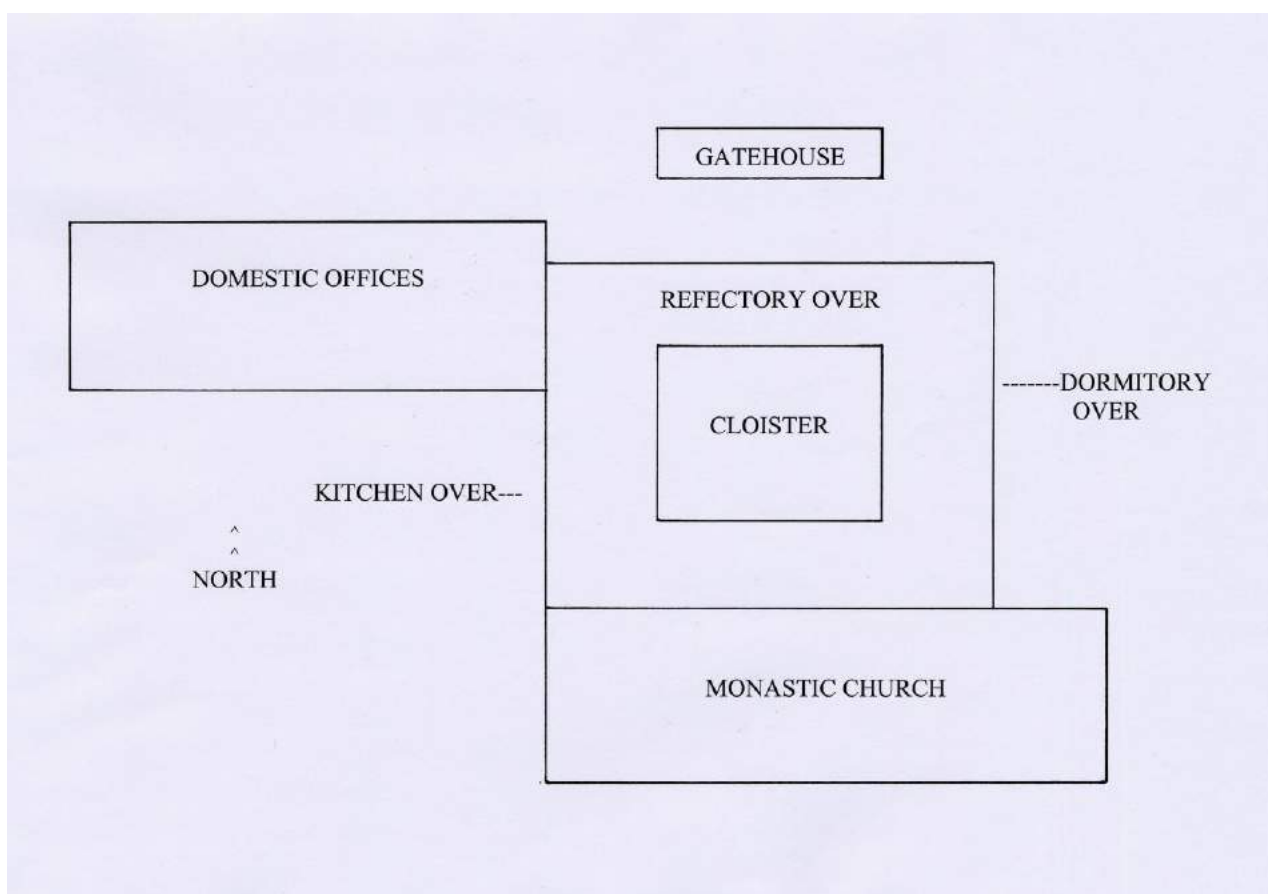


The Radcliffes of Hitchin Priory



The Carmelite Friary

In 1317 King Edward II granted a messuage in Hitchin to the Carmelite Friars. The friary that they built there was not large and consisted of a gatehouse, domestic offices, cloister with kitchen and dormitory over, and a church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.



Plan showing the layout of the original friary buildings

In September 1530, only a short time before his break with Rome, Henry VIII gave the Hitchin friars a gift of 40s.

The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* in 1535 valued The Friary at £4 9s 4d per annum.

In May 1534 the Prior John Butler took the oath recognising the Royal Supremacy.

On 17 October 1538 he and 4 friars surrendered to Sir William Coffyn and Henry Crowche, the King's Commissioners.

Thomas Parrys subsequently acted as bailiff for the Crown – the plate and ornaments were sold, the bells, lead, glass, tile and stone were stripped and the steeple knocked down – the desecrated site became a quarry for the townspeople. There are buildings in Hitchin where stone from the Friary has been found. A survey now held at The National Archives at Kew declared that 'all the buildings were sore decayed and very ruinous both in timber and tile for lack of reparations'. Subsequently the site and building materials left lying around were sold to Sir Edward Watson and Henry Herdson for £1,541.

What happened next? Did they just profit from selling the building materials or did they create a dwelling to let out? We know nothing more for sure until they sold the property to Ralph Radcliffe in 1553.

Ralph Radcliffe 1519-1559



Portrait of Ralph Radcliffe
(Hitchin Worthies by R Hine)

This was the first Ralph Radcliffe to live in Hitchin. He came from a Lancashire family – his cousin was Robert Radcliffe, Earl of Sussex – so he had court connections. He was a scholar of Brasenose College, Oxford, and Jesus College, Cambridge, obtaining an MA in 1539.

As well as converting the Friary into a house it is known that he founded a school there. John Bale, a contemporary of Ralph Radcliffe, records that Radcliffe converted part of the Friary into a stage for his pupils to perform plays from – many of these plays were written by Radcliffe himself. There is a list of 16 of his works in Clutterbuck's *History of Hertfordshire*.

The 17th cent Oxford antiquary Anthony Wood writes that – '*his school was in great renown, he grew rich and was held in much veneration in the neighbourhood*'.

What did he write? From their titles in Clutterbuck they seemed to be moral and improving tales. Anthony Wood states that his scholars acted Latin and English comedies 'so that they might be emboldened for speaking and pronunciation' – using drama as a teaching aid is not new!

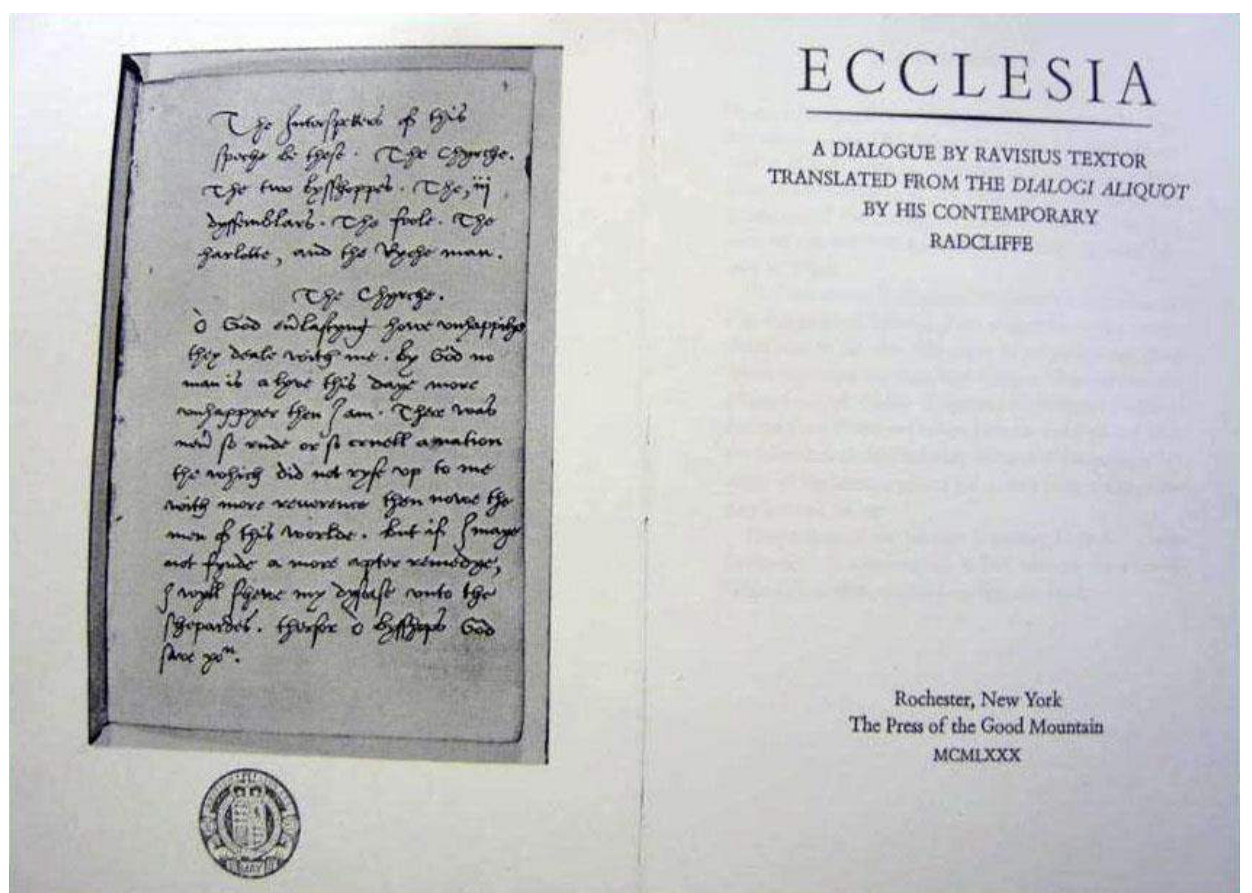
He appears to have written new works himself but none of the texts have survived. His inspiration came from much earlier stories which were well known around Europe e.g. *The Decameron* written in the 14th century. He also translated the work of other scholars, including that of a man called Ravisius Textor, a professor of rhetoric in Paris in the early 16th century.

This is known as *Ecclesia*, the Latin word for church, and was first published in 1530 after Textor's death. It had been widely circulated so Ralph Radcliffe may have known it from University. He translated it into English from the original Latin – the only surviving 16th century manuscript of it is in The National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth.

It takes the form of a dialogue between the Church, 2 bishops, 3 hypocrites, a fool, a harlot and a rich man. As with all satirical comedy it is the fool who speaks the most sense.

It was written in France to highlight everything that was wrong about the Pre-Reformation Church and its ideas were taken up and used against the monasteries in England before the Dissolution.

Its language is simple and it would lend itself to performance by young students – almost slapstick comedy.



In the name of God amen, in the year of our Lord 1558, and in ⁴⁴ 586
years of the Reign of our gracious and dread Sovereigns Phillip & Mary
King & Queen of England France & Spain the 21 Day of Oct.

I Rauffe Radcliffe of Hitchin in the County of Hertford, being
in good mynde & perfect memory, thanks be to God, but sick in body
make this my last Will & Testament,

Imprimis, I bequeath my Soul to the hands of the most mercifull
God Lord, the god of truth, that has redeemed me, most humbly beseeching
his mercy for the innumerable sins, which my wicked Soul has
committed in this miserable world. — I bequeath my vile body to be
buried, when God please, shall be to take me out of this world, and
vale of misery, In such wise and sort, as Christian men are buried
according to the laudable Orders of the Church, & the Discretion of myne
Executors. —

Item I will and bequeath to the Holy Altar 2.

Item I will and bequeath to the Church of Hitchin towards the
reparation thereof 5^l 8^d

Item I will and bequeath to Rauffe Radcliffe myne eldest son
soone, all that my tenements, late Ryecraft, with all Land & parcels
thereto belonging, in as ample manner, as Hue Kinnut occupied &
same, he to take the profits thereof towards his Exhibition,

Item I bequeath to the said Rauffe my House called the Falcon
to the Appurtenances, which house I give and bequeath, to my Wyffe
during term of her lyfe natural, after, to descend to Rauffe, also I
give and bequeath, unto my said Wyffe 12 Acres of free Land, in
Walkworth, & Wymondley Wyldes, which after her decease, I give to
Jeremy my soone, Item, I give & bequeath to Edward Radcliffe
all that my house, called Sturgens Savings, Item, I give out of the
said Lands 40 a Year, to my Syster, during her lyfe.

Copy of the will of Ralph Radcliffe, 21 October 1558 (DE/R F2)

Ralph Radcliffe died in 1559 aged 40. He had made his will the previous year during the last year of the reign of Queen Mary Tudor and it is very much in the Catholic tradition. The collection at Hertfordshire Archives includes this 17th cent copy of the will which had originally been proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury – in itself an indication of his standing at his death, as only the more wealthy families with property in more than one diocese took their wills to be proved there.

His wife Elizabeth inherits all his property with smaller gifts to his sons Ralph, the eldest, Jeremy and Edward. All his books are 'to be divided equally amongst my children'. It would be wonderful to know exactly what they were, but only one, *Plato's Works*, is mentioned in a specific bequest to Master Docwra. Of furniture, only the beds are listed – one to every child. At their father's death Ralph, the eldest was still only 16, Jeremy's age was uncertain and the youngest, Edward, was aged 6.

before God, at the Day of Judgment. —

Memorandum

This Ralph Radcliffe, lived twenty three years at Hitchin and died anno 1559 — aged forty. Ralph Radcliffe his son died ~~at~~ at Hitchin 1621 aged 78. Jeremy Radcliffe died Rector of Orwell in the County of Cambridge where he is buried. Edward Radcliffe the youngest of the three sons died at Hitchin 1631. Aged 70 So Ralph the 2^d was but ¹⁶ years old ~~at the~~ Death when he was appointed one of his Executors by the beforegoing Will.

Memorandum on the back of the copy will (DE/R F2)

This memorandum added on the back of the document was written possibly in the 17th century. It states that Ralph Radcliffe lived 23 years at Hitchin and died in 1559 aged 40. His son Ralph died in 1621 aged 78, Jeremy died Rector of Orwell in Cambridgeshire where he is buried and Edward the youngest son died at Hitchin in 1631 aged 70.

Can we believe the memorandum?

Burke's peerage says Edward died in 1631 aged 78, which would make him 6 when his father died.

If Ralph had lived 23 years at Hitchin by the time of his death in 1559 aged 40, then he had come to Hitchin in 1536 aged 16. If that is so then he had known the Friary before it was dissolved.

Where did he live?

Did he rent the property from the King's commissioners before he had the wealth to buy it in 1553?

Elizabeth became responsible for administering the estate after her husband's death although the memorandum states that her eldest son Ralph was appointed an executor in the will.

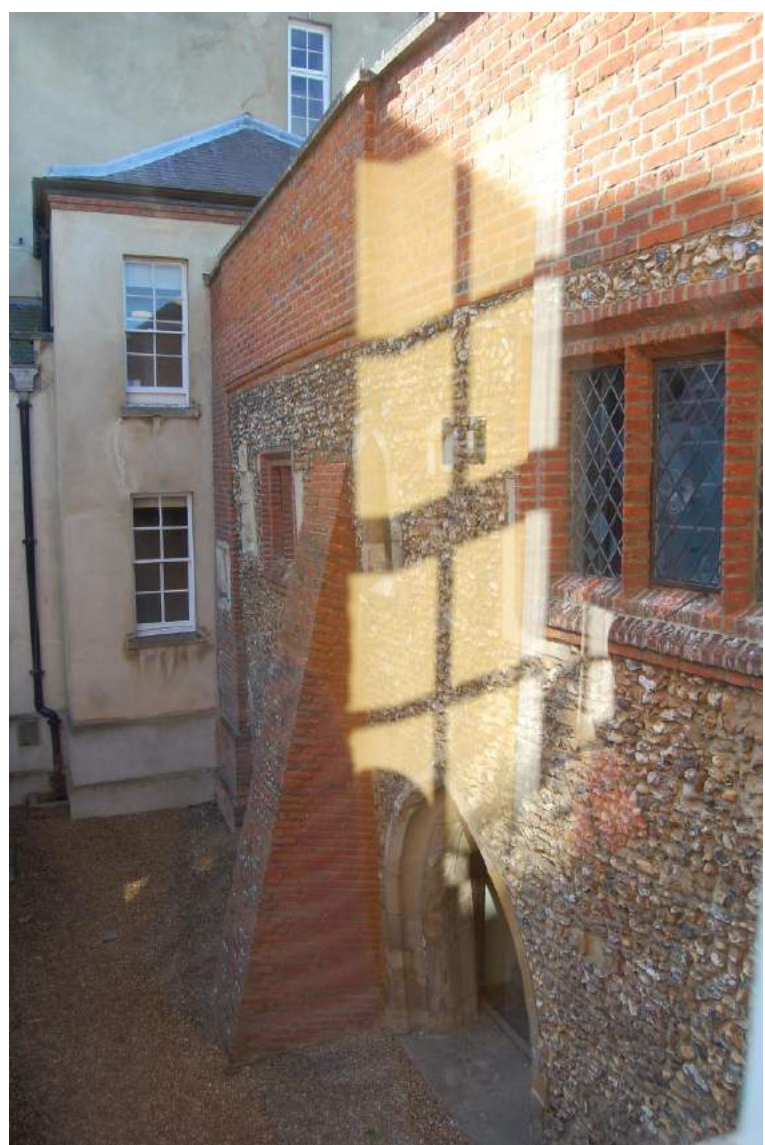
The accounts show that the value of Ralph's goods is given as £95 7s, and that over £54 is owed to him. Ralph's debts that Elizabeth had to repay amounted to £140. His funeral expenses and payments to the poor were 46s 8d.

Obviously with a young family Elizabeth would have remained at the Priory — she was in charge until the young Ralph came of age.



Engraving showing the garden view of the Priory c1705 (DE/Gr 47)

From the garden – if we take this to mean the south front then it would appear that the west range of the cloister is the only part to have survived from the old monastic buildings. Indeed this is the area today where the most medieval work is still visible. There is no trace of the church or the east and south ranges of the cloister.

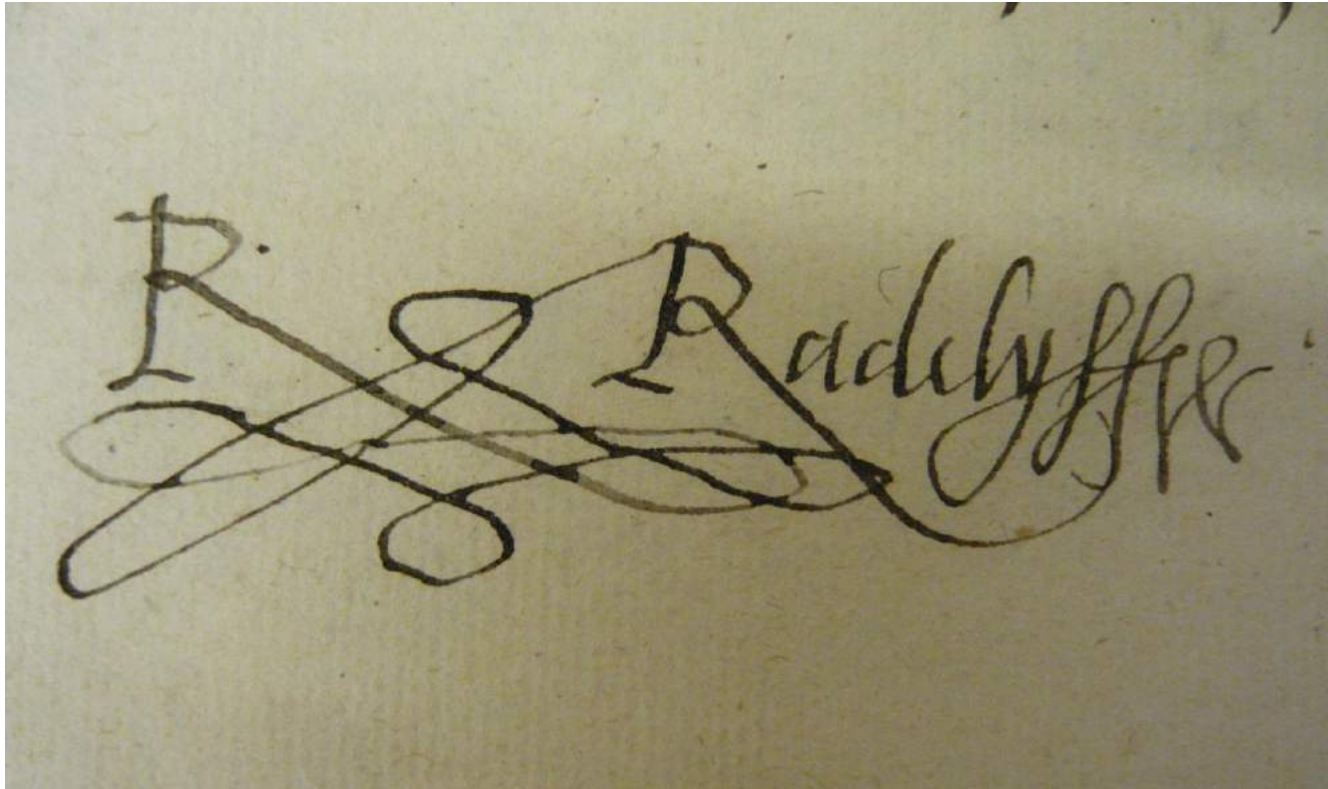


Present day view of the west range (HALS image)



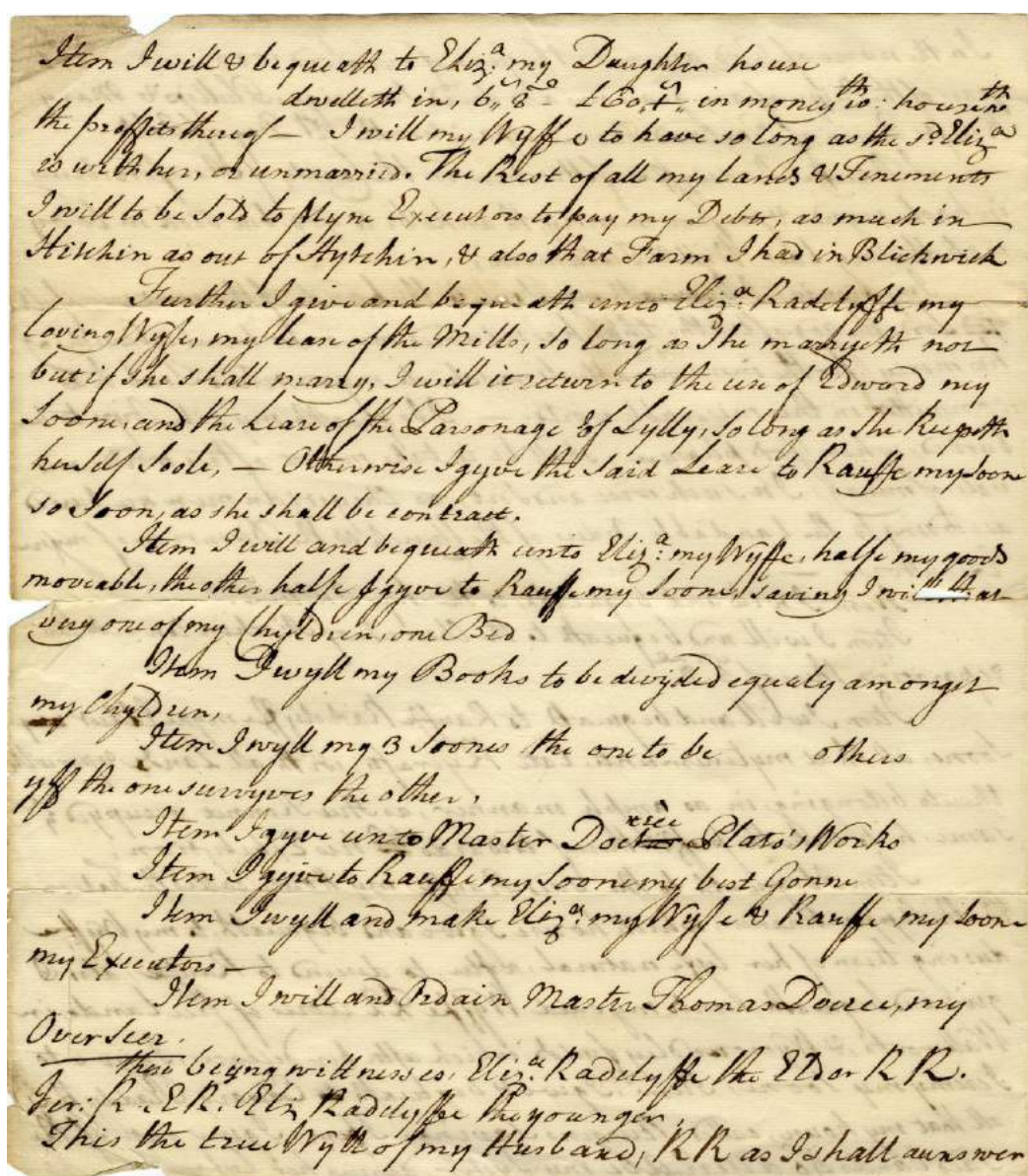
View of the Priory cloister in 1921 (Country Life Magazine)

Ralph Radcliffe 1543-1621



Ralph was only 16 when his father died so he had to grow up quickly. He lived throughout the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, through all the turbulent changes to the Church of England. He was a lawyer at the Inner Temple and may have lived mostly in London. He died in 1621 aged 78.

His will is very different in character to his father's – he commits his soul into the hands of God 'believing by the only death and passion of His dear Son my Lord and only Saviour Jesus Christ to receive and have full and free remission and pardon of all my innumerable sins'. He is to be buried in Hitchin Church 'without any vainglorious extraordinary charges and expence'.



Item I will & bequeath to Eliz^a my Daughter house
dwelleth in, b^y 8th - 1 Coth in money to house
the profits thereof - I will my Wyffe to have so long as she liveth
is with her, or unmarried. The Rest of all my landes & Tenements
I will to be sold to plym Excutors to pay my Debts, as much in
Hitchin as out of Hychin, & also that Farm I had in Blichwick
Further I give and bequeath unto Eliz^a Radcliffe my
Loving Wyffe, my lease of the Milles, so long as she maye live, nor
but if she shall marry, I will it returne to the use of Edward my
Sonne, and the lease of the Parsonage of Lylly, so long as she keepeth
her self soole, - Otherwise I give the said Lease to Rauffe my sonne
so soon, as she shall be contract.
Item I will and bequeath unto Eliz^a my Wyffe, halfe my goods
movable, the other halfe I give to Rauffe my Sonne, saving I will that
any one of my Chyldren, one Bed.
Item I will my Books to be divided equally amongst
my Chyldren.
Item I will my 3 Soones the one to be others
if the one survives the other.
Item I give unto Master Doct^r Plato's Works
Item I give to Rauffe my Sonne my best Gonne
Item I will and make Eliz^a my Wyffe & Rauffe my sonne
my Executors -
Item I will and bequeath Master Thomas Douce, my
Overseer.
These being witnesses, Eliz^a Radcliffe the 2^d Do^r R R.
Jm: R. E. R. Eliz^a Radcliffe the younger
This the true Wylle of my Husband, R R as I shall answer

Copy will of the second Ralph Radcliffe (DE/R F2)

Some of his bequests:

To his godson Ralph Skynner the younger 20s (possibly an ancestor of the John Skynner who founded the Hitchin almshouses in 1666)

Faithful servant John Daye, bailiff of the manor of Maydencroft 20s.

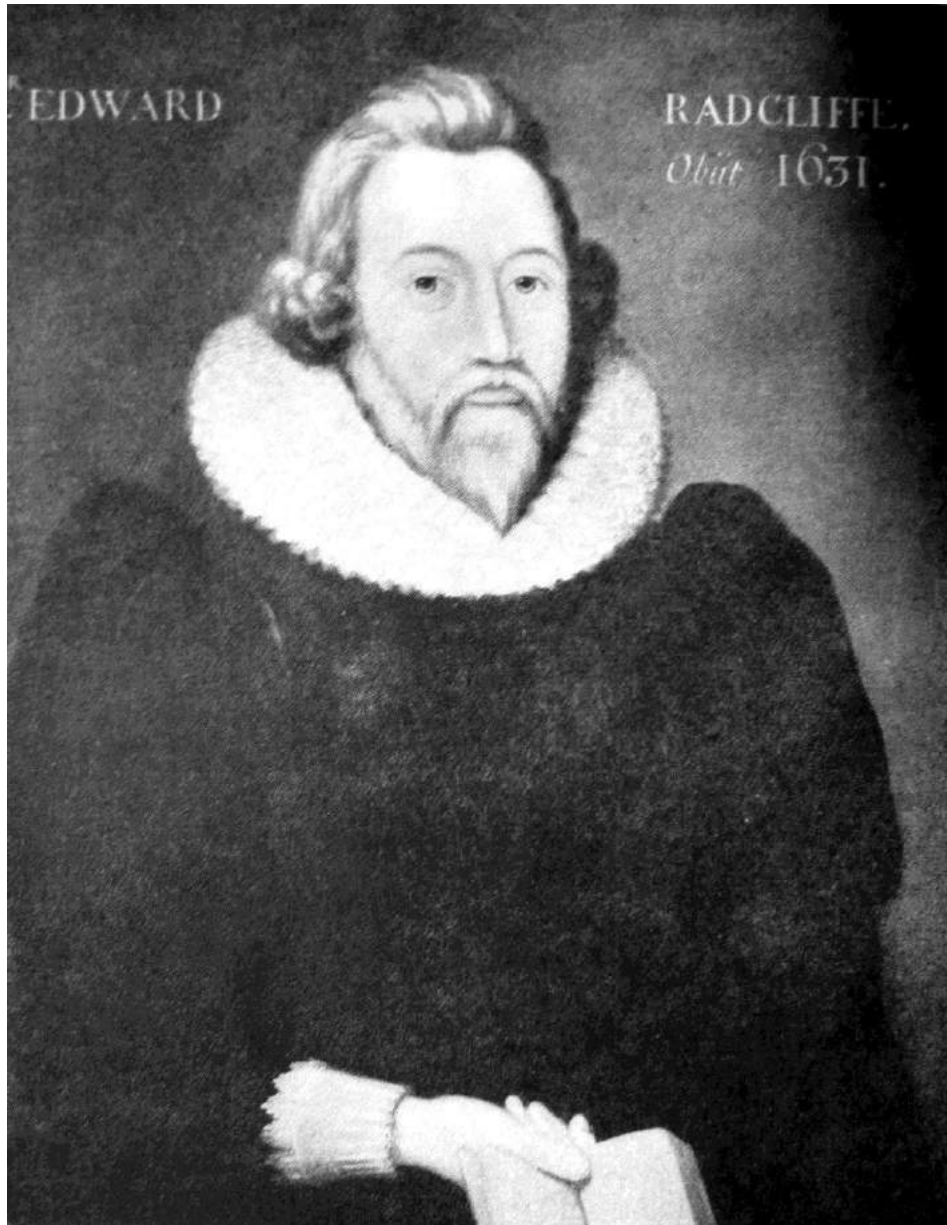
'Old' servant Elizabeth Rayment 10s.

Alice Elsey, nurse 20s and all other servants 6s 8d each.

4a arable land – yearly rent to be used for the relief of the aged and impotent people of Hitchin and binding poor fatherless children as apprentices – he says his wife asked him to do this before his death.

Plus £40 for the poor of Hitchin generally.

Sir Edward Radcliffe 1553-1631



Sir Edward Radcliffe, physician to King James I
(Hitchin Worthies by R Hine)

This small volume lists the tenants of the Radcliffe estates outside Hitchin with the amounts that they had to pay in rent.

It includes the Manor of Maydencroft at Gosmore, and lands in Stevenage and Cambridgeshire. The total rental income is given as just over £200 per annum (based on average earnings that would be about £370,000 today!)

The book lists John Mattock, gent, who founded the Free School in Hitchin in 1632 and John Skinner, gent – possibly the same person who founded the Hitchin almshouses in 1666.

Ralph's wife Elizabeth had died before him and they left no children. So the heir to the Priory and its estates was Edward born in 1590, son of Sir Edward the physician.

While Ralph was away being a lawyer in London the Priory had been leased to Sir Edward, possibly when he retired from court life. The papers at HALS connected with this lease list in detail the Priory estates – they consist of the Priory itself plus 117 acres of land in and around Hitchin.

For the first time we have a description of the Priory in detail – consisting of a hall, little parlour, dining chamber, my lady's chamber, Mr Radcliffe's chamber, maid's chamber, men's chamber, gallery chamber, 2 lofts, linen, pewter, brass, brewhouse, milkhouse, stable, little room by the kitchen and clock chamber. In addition there are 3 carts, 2 ploughs, collars and various harness and 3 chamber pots!

103-4

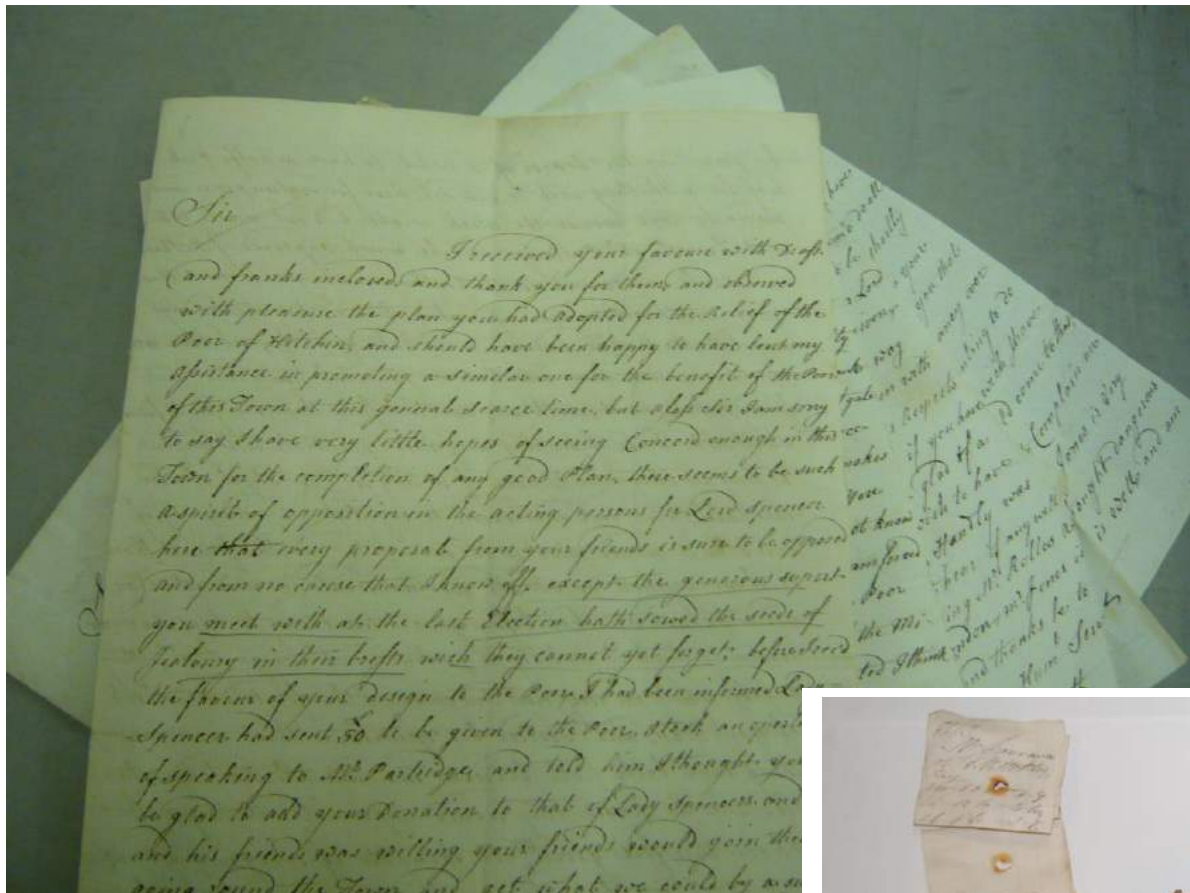
A Rentall of the Mannour of Maiden Croft, for Rents to be payd by y^e halfe-yeare

Hitchin.

	li:	s:	d:
Lucas Norton, Ar:	0	4	2
John Mattock, gent:	1	0	11 ¹ / ₂
William Fryer, kni ^t :	0	0	11 ¹ / ₂
Richard Deards	0	4	2 ¹ / ₂
Robert Draper	0	0	11
John Skinner, gent:	0	1	10 ¹ / ₂
John Tristram	0	9	1 ³ / ₄

Rental of the Manor of Maydencroft, 1628
(DE2A)

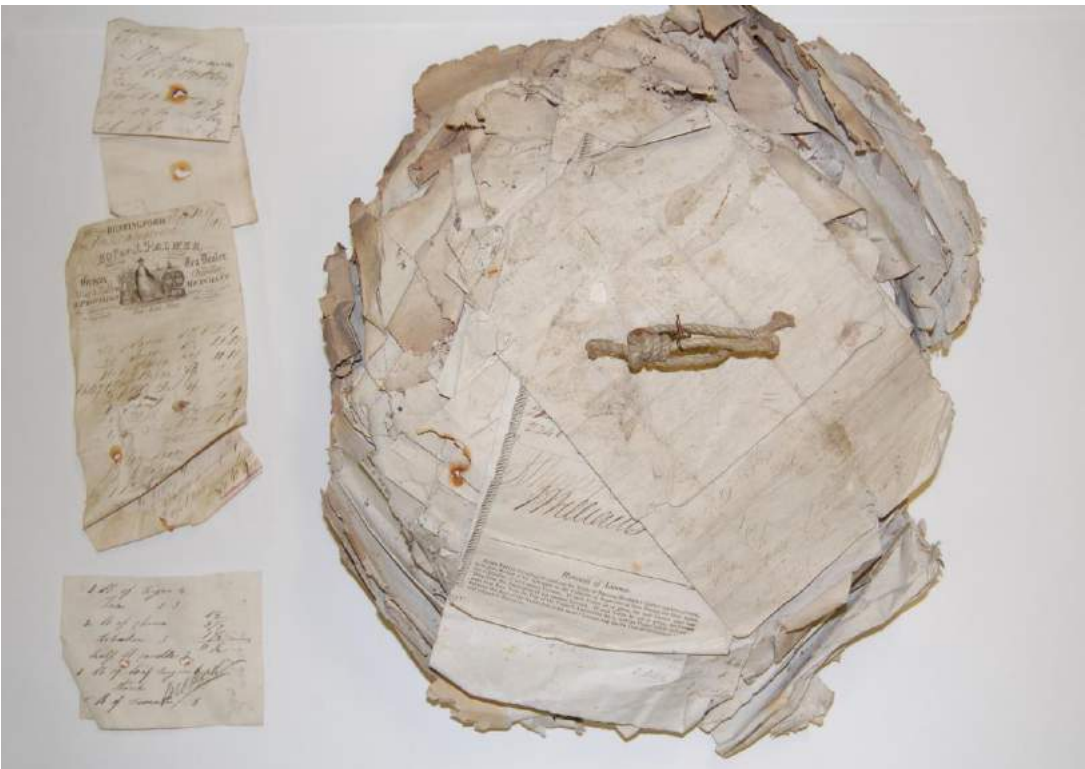
Correspondence



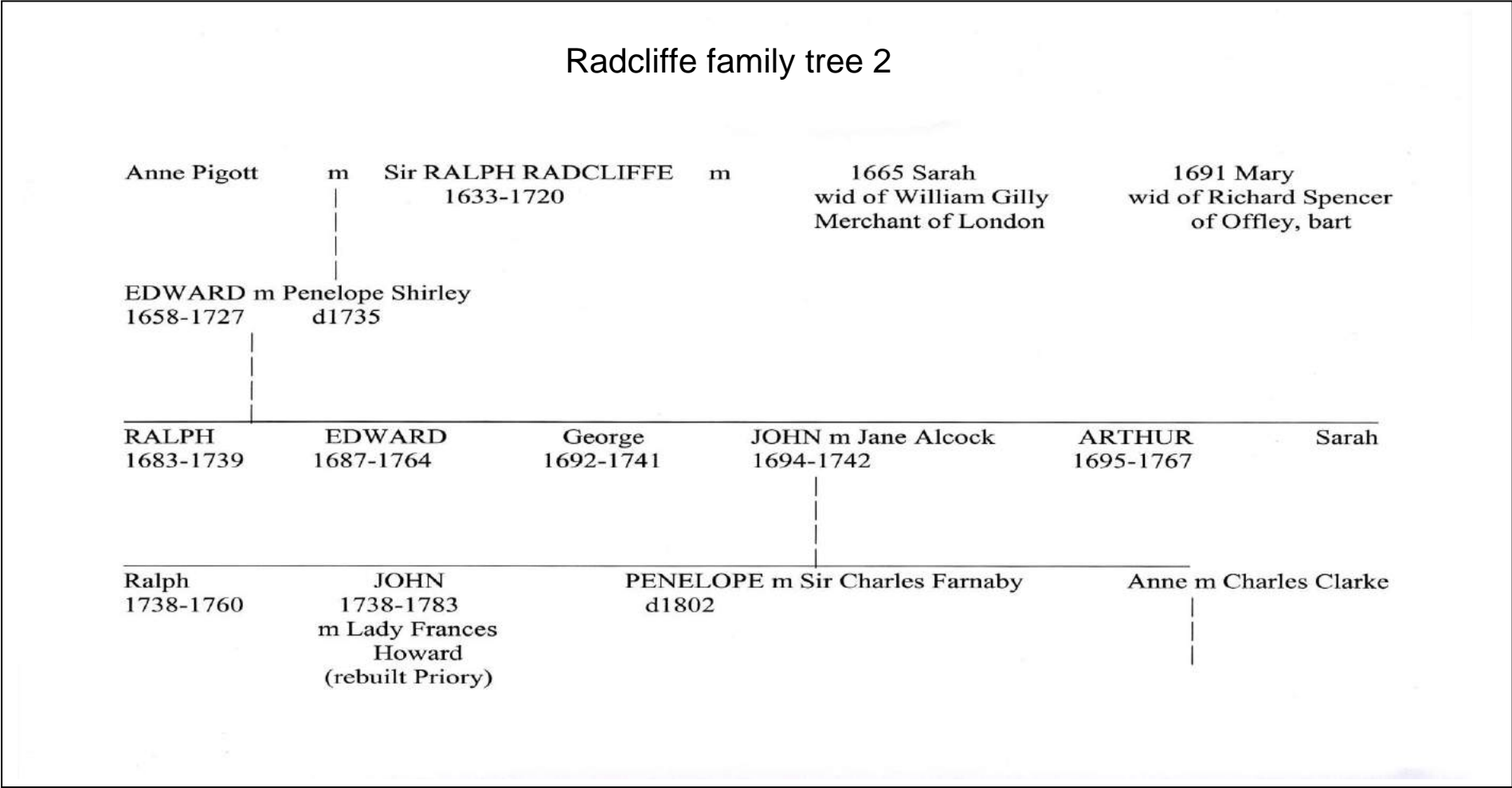
What further marks this collection out from others at Hertfordshire Archives is the family correspondence, which survives from the end of the 17th century to the end of the 18th.
(more words?)

In order to provide for his son’s growing brood of children, Ralph ensured that they had to work for their living!

The eldest of Edward’s sons (a grandson of Ralph who was also named Ralph) was apprenticed in 1702 aged 19 to Matthew Chitty, a substantial English merchant in Amsterdam for 5 years at a premium of £400 paid by his grandfather.



The second son Edward was apprenticed in 1704 aged 17 to Nicholas Morse, a Levant merchant in London and after 3 years was sent by his master to learn the trade of a factor at Aleppo in modern Syria.



The Levant Trade

The Levant trade was very lucrative so the brothers worked in partnership, one in London and one in Aleppo, so they could control their business within the family. The two younger brothers George and Arthur also joined the business from 1715.



English merchants to have exclusive rights to trade with the Turkish Ottoman Empire. The area known as the Levant now includes the modern countries of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria.

Aleppo is a city in Northern Syria – today it has a population of 1.9 million and is the 2nd largest city in Syria after the capital Damascus. It is one of the oldest inhabited cities in history – a strategic trading point between the Mediterranean Sea and the River Euphrates. To send goods back to England they had to be loaded onto camels and be carried over 80km of desert and mountain to Aleppo's port of Scanderoon.

The merchants who went there as factors stayed for 5 or more years before ever coming home.

Aleppo is 2,000 miles away in the Eastern Mediterranean, formerly part of the Turkish Empire.

It could take upwards of two months for correspondence to travel back and forth.

Manifest of the New Phillis Capt: Geo: Long for London the 25th June 1750

Marks	By whom Shipped	Sacks Mohair Wool	Bales Carpets	Sacks Wool	Sacks Cotton wool	Bales B. Lard	Sacks Printed Valence	Sacks Carpets	Salop
MM M	Messrs Lieut Master	87	3	7	—	—	—	—	John & Thomas march
FM	D ^o	—	—	6	—	—	—	—	Henry march
FE	D ^o	11	—	—	—	—	—	—	John Eaton
D	D ^o	24	—	—	—	—	—	—	Charles Lisle
WBWBWBWB	Messrs Tho: Smith & Rich ^d	119	18	13	208	97	189	—	William Bellamy
L	D ^o	11	3	2	—	—	—	—	James Lacks
WH	D ^o	14	—	—	—	—	—	—	William Hayter
B	D ^o	14	—	—	—	—	—	—	Benjamin Bond Jun ^r
S	D ^o	11	—	—	—	—	—	—	Charles Smyth
IS	D ^o	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	James Sperling
B	D ^o	6	—	3	—	—	—	—	George Bond
B	D ^o	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	2 Benjamin Bond
FL	D ^o	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	Francis Levett
		311	24	31	208	97	189	2	

Manifest of the ship New Phillis (DE/R B387/40)

This manifest, or Bill of Lading, relates to the ship *New Phillis* bound for London in June 1750 from Smirna. Smirna is still a port in modern Turkey now called Izmir. The cargo on board includes bales of wool and carpets. Fortunately for this vessel, captained by George Long, she arrived home safely as a note on the back states that she 'reached the Thames in September 1750'.

The Levant trade was a trade in luxury goods – silk, carpets and mohair wool – which gained the family very high profits until the 1750s. It was after the deaths of Edward Radcliffe in 1764 and Arthur Radcliffe in 1767 that the family's involvement ceased.

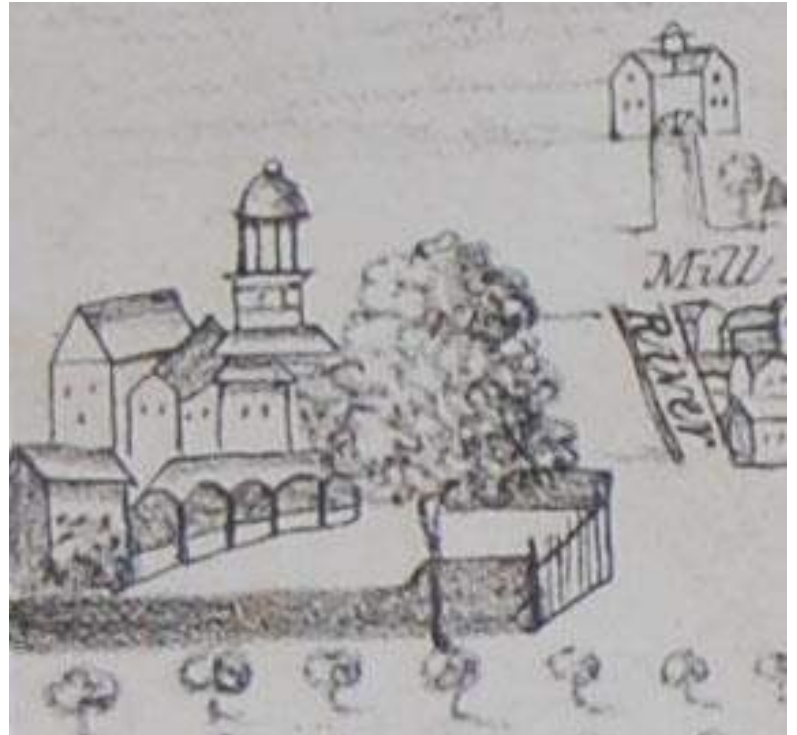


Carpet making by hand in Turkey today. The process has not changed a great deal from the methods used in the 18th century.

Sir Ralph Radcliffe 1633-1720

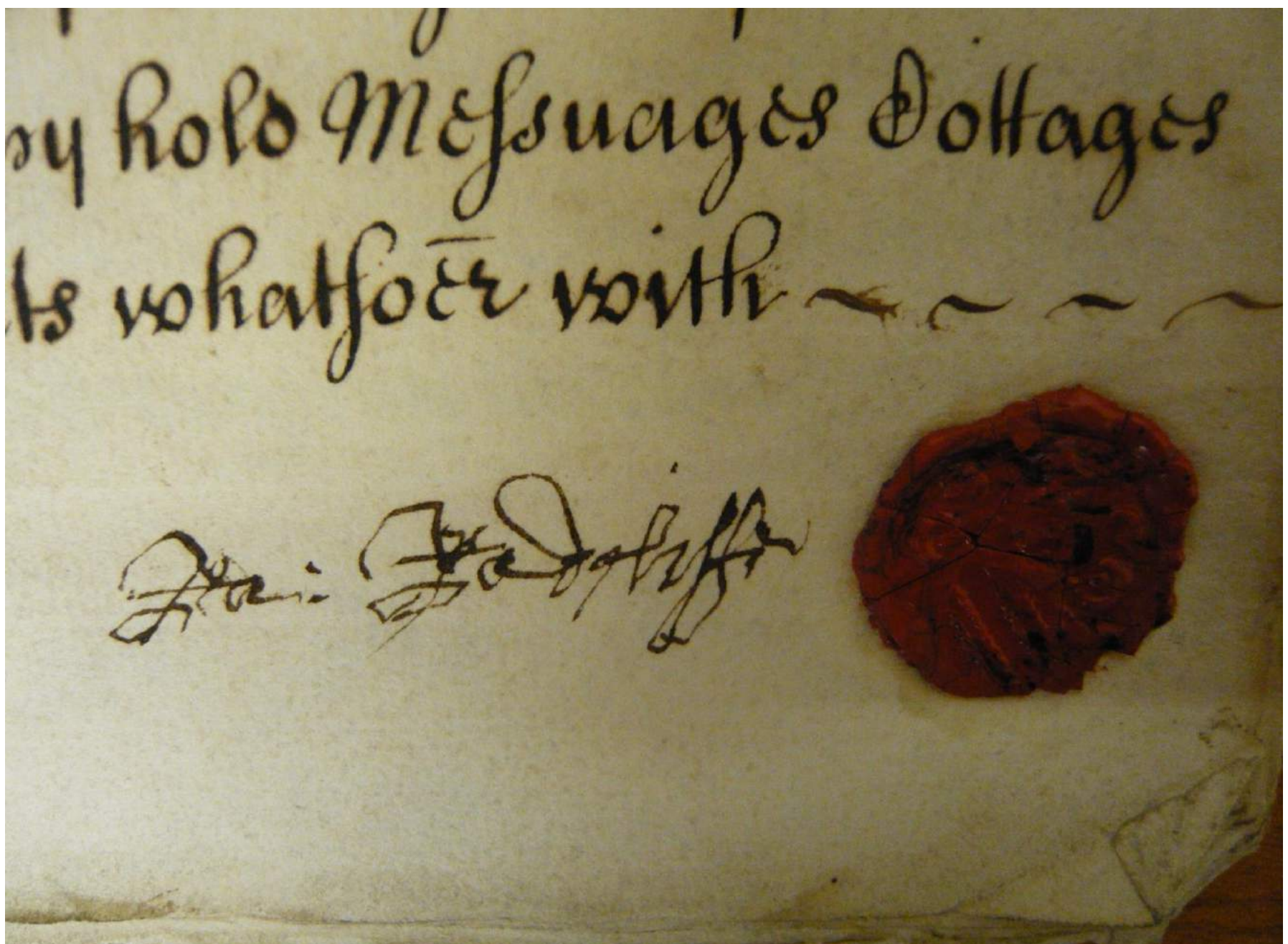


Portrait of Ralph Radcliffe
(Hitchin Worthies by R Hine)



Detail from a map of Hitchin c1700 showing
the extent of Priory and its grounds during
Sir Ralph's lifetime
(Hertfordshire by Sir Henry Chauncy)

Ralph's heir, his son Edward, inherited the whole of the Priory Estate with substantial sums in South Sea and East India stock, in addition to the stake in the Levant Company trade. The will also bequeathes 40s per annum for bread to be distributed to the Hitchin poor at Christmas.



This will was made in 1714 when Ralph was already 81 years old. His signature is very scratchy.
(DE/R F43)



Monument to the Radcliffe family in Hitchin church

£100 is set aside in Ralph's will for this monument to be erected. It is a splendid memorial, dominating the East end of the church to the right of the altar. It declares of Ralph – *'having improved his great natural genius by travelling into the most polite countries of Europe, where he gained a perfect knowledge of the world, at his return home he preferred the peaceful exercises of a rural life to the splendour of courts and cites'*.

He did not have to endure the hardships of a stay in Aleppo where many traders did not return because of disease but his love of rural pursuits was inherited by his descendants.