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History of the Ligon Family in England

by The Rev. Dr. Albert Clinton Walling II

As my cousin, Lady Dorothy Lygon Heber-Percy descended the great stairway at the ancient and venerable and majestic Madresfield Court she reached for the newel post to step onto the floor. She was greeting us, her American Lygon cousins as we were being honored with a luncheon and reception. Madresfield was her childhood home as a daughter of the 7th Earl Beauchamp, Sir William Lygon, Knight of the Garter and his wife, Lady Lettice Grosvenor, sister of the second Duke of Westminster. She was very much at home as her life began there, and her warm and friendly manner made all of us feel at home. Madresfield was the home of our American immigrant ancestor, Col. Thomas Lygon, who came to Virginia in 1641 with his 2nd cousin, Sir William Berkeley, the Royal Governor of Virginia.

That newel post at the foot of the stair was a beautifully carved solid wooden bear. The bear appears on the coat of arms of the Earl Beauchamp, Lady Dorothy's father, and it is a reminder of the ancient Norman Beauchamp family's earliest Norman ancestor, the famous Urso d'Abitot, sometimes called the Notorious Sheriff of Worcester. Urso's name is from the Latin word for bear. He accompanied William the Conqueror from Normandy and was a key figure in making the Norman Conquest a success. He was a relative and companion of the King and was richly rewarded for his services with vast Royal Landgrants, castles, etc., making his heiress daughter, Emmeline one of the wealthiest women in the newly Norman England. She married into the Beauchamp family who became allied by marriage with the Lygon family, another Norman family. The heiress, Anne Beauchamp, married Richard Lygon, bestowing great wealth on the Lygons and giving the Lygons the wonderful Beauchamp blood and history.

The Beauchamps are a favorite family in my Lygon ancestry for many reasons. They are colorful, active, powerful, courageous, dashing and attractive in so many ways. They were very French and became great English people. Their honors and deeds seem endless and spectacular. Once when I visited St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle my attention was called to the Beauchamp names on the walls of the Chapel. These were the names of those who had received England's highest honor. They were Knights of the Garter, and this is the Garter Chapel and it is at the principal home of the King or Queen. It is the burial place of many members of the Royal Family, including the parents of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. Windsor Castle was begun by William the Conqueror as a fortress early in his reign. It is still considered the principal residence of the Sovereign. The round tower remains central to the Castle.

In my opinion, there are five families which have become joined and have made the Lygon family great. They are the deBracy, the Lygon, the Berkeley, the Beauchamp, and the Grosvenor families. Each has added a vital part in making a great family. The deBracy family held the earliest land grant to Madresfield Court and were developers of the Manor. A deBracy heiress married a Lygon and the property became the property of the Lygon family nearly a thousand years ago. The Lygons have retained ownership to this day. They intermarried with the Berkeley family of Berkeley Castle and brought that ancient Saxon and early Norman blood in. The Beauchamps brought great achievement and established wealth as did in more modern times the Grosvenor family. On my visit to Windsor Castle and the St. George Chapel of which I spoke I asked how they would describe the achievement and wealth of the Beauchamps. The answer was that they would be comparable to the Grosvenors of today, exceedingly wealthy and prominent and powerful and influential.

The Lygons, beginning with the first Beauchamp heir's entrance into the family of the Lords of the Manor of Madresfield, rose greatly socially as well as monetarily. They rather consistently intermarried with the other great Norman families as well as an early marriage with the famous Berkeley family of Berkeley Castle, one of England's most famous and historic castles and still occupied by our cousins, the Berkeley family. The Berkeleys were connected by blood with the Anglo Saxon Berkeleys and the castle is still owned by the family as is the Lygon Madresfield Court after approximately 1,000 years. As the Beauchamps and Lygons have from the beginning of Norman England been the leading families of Worcestershire, so our Berkeley cousins have been the leading family of Gloucestershire close by.

The historic Madresfield Court and the historic Berkeley Castle have been visible symbols of the constancy of those who still own them. The owners, with very few exceptions, have been unusually devoted to the monarch, being loyal servants, close friends, and relatives of all of the royal houses from William the Conqueror to the present time. The families have produced many Lord Stewards of the Royal Household, many Ladies-in-waiting to the Queens and Gentlemen of the

Household , Prime Ministers, etc. from generation to generation. Every Sovereign of England beginning with King Henry VII, has been a direct descendant of the Beauchamp family. King Henry's grandmother was Lady Margaret Beauchamp and his mother was Lady Margaret Beaufort. The Beauchamp blood comes down to the present Sovereign, Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. The Lygons who carry the Beauchamp blood since early Norman times, have been close to the Royal family in modern times. The 7th Earl Beauchamp, Sir William Lygon, K.G., was the Lord Steward of the Royal Household to H.M. King Edward VII , and Lord Beauchamp's sister, Lady Mary Lygon, was a close friend and principal Lady-in-Waiting to H.M. Queen Mary. Lord Beauchamp bore the Sword of State for King George V at his coronation, a high honor for the Lygon family. Queen Mary, the present Queen's grandmother, was a sister-in-law to Lady Margaret Grosvenor, who married the Duke of Teck, Queen Mary's brother. The Duchess of Teck was a sister to Lady Lettice Grosvenor who married the 7th Earl Beauchamp, Sir William Lygon of Madresfield Court.

The most recent close connection of the Lygons and Beauchamps with the Royal Family exists now and will carry the constancy and loyalty of the Lygons into the future of England and the Royal Family. Some years ago one of the world's most eminent genealogists, Gary Boyd Roberts, made a study of the late Princess Diana, Princess of Wales and mother of the two Royal Princes, the second and third Heirs to the Throne, HRH Prince William and HRH Prince Harry. The Late Princess of Wales had three direct lines of direct descent from Sir William Lygon and his wife, Lady Eleanor Dennis, both of whom are our direct ancestors from the 16th century. In our direct Lygon lines Mr. Roberts is also a Lygon, and he gave us a copy of his work tracing Diana, Princess of Wales from the Lygons to the current heirs to the throne, the two Royal Princes. That work was elaborated on by Peggy Gill Thompson and by me, showing the three Lygon lines of descent which make Prince William and Prince Harry 12th cousins of many of us in the current generation of descent from the mutual ancestors of the Royal Family and us. The Lygons and Beauchamps will appear as direct ancestors of the current Royalty in three direct lines.

This linkage of the current and future Royal Family with Madresfield Court and Berkeley Castle, our ancestral homes and our direct ancestors, is a proud and precious heritage which we, the American Ligons have inherited. Many of the Royal Family have been guests of their Lygon cousins through the years. The unflinching loyalty to the Sovereign and his or her family has existed for approximately 1,000 years. Royal history and our family history have merged in many ways and at many times over the millennium since the year 1066, the beginning of Norman England and modern England. Madresfield Court and Berkeley Castle still stand, stately, historic, gracious, and strikingly beautiful and majestic, symbols of steadiness and constancy, and loyalty, rocks of Gibraltar and symbols of loyalty and faith.

We as modern members of these great families can take pride in many ways in our heritage, especially as it relates to the Royal Family as well as the nation we love as our ancestral nation. We are a part of English history as well as American history. On two notable occasions Madresfield Court has played a key role in English history and the preservation of the nation and of the Royal Family. In the reign of King George III, who was Queen Elizabeth II's grt-grt-grt-grt grandfather, there was a serious threat to England and the King. There was fear of a Napoleonic invasion of England with a threat to the King and Kingdom. The Royal Family called on their Lygon cousins to provide them with a safe place of refuge in the event of a French invasion of England. The Royal Family were invited to come to Madresfield Court until all danger had passed...The ancient house with its mediaeval moat, was designated officially as a Royal Refuge. It was not used as such as the danger passed, but it has had that honor and distinction of having been officially designated a Royal Refuge.

Much more recently, during World War II, there was a threat to the Royal Family of an invasion by the Nazis. The Nazis were bombing England and London. If they carried out plans for an invasion of England, a place of refuge for the Royal Family would be needed. Once again, Madresfield Court was chosen, and the Royal Princesses (later Queen Elizabeth II and her sister Princess Margaret Rose) were to go to Madresfield as guests of Lord and Lady Beauchamp. They were to stay for the duration if necessary. Also, Queen Mary was a guest at Badminton House for the duration.

Madresfield, that wonderful and beautiful and historic home, is still owned in trust and is cherished by all of us who are direct descendants of the original owners. What a privileged heritage we have! It's great to be a Ligon or Lygon!

The Berkeley Family of Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire

As the Lygon family of Madresfield Court intermarried with other great historic families such as the Beauchamps and the Grosvenors, they married a uniquely famous family by marriage with the Berkeley family of Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire. It is in many ways England's most historic castle. It is not only ancient and still owned by the one family, but it is also incredibly beautiful and romantic.

In addition to its beauty it is the location of the murder of King Edward II. Lord Berkeley was not in residence at the time of the crime, but he was the lord of the Manor and Castle. Berkeley Castle is one of the most visited castles and sites in the United Kingdom.

The Berkeley family members, including the Lygons in England , have the distinction of being directly descended from both the Lords of Berkeley in Anglo Saxon times as well as being directly descended from the Norman Lords of

Berkeley. The Norman who accompanied William the Conqueror at the Conquest in 1066 A.D. and was created Lord of Berkeley Castle, did not oust the Saxon Lord Berkeley but rather married into that family and thus mixed the blood of the old Saxon Lord Berkeley with his new Norman blood as the new Lord Berkeley. The subsequent Berkeleys could claim both Saxon and Norman lordships in a continuous line. This is quite rare.

The member of the Berkeley family who came to the Colony of Virginia in America was Sir William Berkeley of Berkeley Castle. He was high in the favor of the King who appointed him Royal Governor of Virginia. His grandmother was Lady Margaret Lygon of Madresfield. Governor Sir William Berkeley invited his second cousin, Col. Thomas Lygon of Madresfield Court in Worcestershire, to accompany him to Virginia. Gov. Berkeley appointed Col. Lygon to some of the highest positions in the Virginia colony. Col. Thomas Lygon married Mary Harris, daughter of Captain Thomas Harris, and they became the direct ancestors of the American branch of the Lygon family and began using the Ligon spelling. The American Ligans or Lygons carry the ancient Saxon Berkeley blood as well as the newer Norman Berkeley blood.

The Berkeley name is famous in America. One of the original Virginia plantations was given the name Berkeley Plantation as it was owned by the English Berkeleys. It later became the family home of the Harrison family who produced two Presidents of the United States of America and many aristocratic Virginia families. Such notable events as the First Thanksgiving and the playing of the military hymn ♦Taps♦ occurred at Berkeley Plantation.

The Berkeleys in England are mingled with many other notable families in America. One of America♦s most notable institutions of higher learning was founded in Berkeley, California in a town named for the famous philosopher Anglican Bishop Berkeley. The University of California at Berkeley is a major American university. It is noteworthy that Gen. George Washington, America♦s first President, was directly descended from the Berkeleys of Berkeley Castle and was closely related to Col. Thomas Lygon of Madresfield Court and later of Virginia. Another Berkeley cousin was sent to Virginia to serve as the Royal Governor. He was Sir Norborne Berkeley, known as Lord Botetourt. He was beloved in Virginia.

On one of my many trips to England I visited Berkeley Castle and took the tour. The docent arrived at a life-size oil painting of Gov. Sir William Berkeley and she said, ♦I know you Americans pronounce his name Burrrrrly, but it is really pronounced as Barclay, and we are right and should know as he was born here!♦ The English family of Berkeley and Lygon have produced two Royal Governors of Virginia, which is quite rare in history and quite remarkable.

The Lygon Family in England and the Church of England

The Lygon family in England, with the connecting families of Beauchamp, Berkeley, Grosvenor, Stanhope, have historically and consistently been closely connected by blood and marriage to the Church and the Monarchy. England is a country which for centuries has been deeply and inextricably governed by Church and State. As a constitutional monarchy, the sovereign personifies both. The Sovereign is the Head of State and is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, the State Church..

The English Lygons are essentially a Norman family. The Lygon name is French as are the other surnames such as Beauchamp and Grosvenor, These families came into England with our direct ancestor William the Conqueror. King William was not only a great soldier, but he was also an exceptional organizer and executive. He conquered Saxon England in 1066 A.D. as a result of his administrative skills and fearless and ruthless military tactics. He established a society which was built on strong families bound together by close kinship. The Norman nobility were largely his kinsmen who were loyal to him and were richly rewarded by him through gifts of land and titles. The Lygons are a perfect example of how his system worked and continues to work in England. The King also controlled the kingdom through the Church and its leadership.

In many ways, Norman England is still alive in England today. When I visited Sandringham House in Norfolk, East Anglia, we were shown through the magnificent house, and in the dining room we were told that the Royal Family converses in French at dinner when they are in residence. Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, speaks fluent French. She is related by her Norman French blood to our other Norman French families such as the Lygons and Beauchamps and this closeness has continued since the Norman Conquest. The Royal Family attend the parish Church at Sandringham regularly when they are in residence.

The Christian religion came early to the British Isles. Within a very few years of the Crucifixion and Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ and the appointment of the Apostolic Band who became the original Christian Church, Roman soldiers were converted to Christianity and were despatched to Britain to control the half pagan inhabitants of the British Isles. The Christian Faith of the newly-converted Roman soldiers was spread throughout the invaded land. The apostolic, rather loosely-organized faith spread through the Apostles whom Jesus chose. A great evangelization of the whole Roman empire began, and England was a part of that Empire. With Saint Peter and the Twelve, the Faith became organized into what came to be called the Church Catholic, or the Church of the whole world. Since the Roman Empire was the leading world power and Rome was the chief city of the Roman Empire, the Church came to be called the Catholic Church. This is how Christianity spread to England in the first century of the Christian Era. England♦s Church was under the rule of the Pope in Rome who sent Christian missionaries to spread the Faith. This

loosely-organized English Church was directed by the Pope in Rome. This was the situation for about 500 years. A powerful Pope, Pope Gregory, in the year 597 A.D. decided to send a bishop to England to be the papal representative and to be the head of the Church in England. He chose Saint Augustine, who became the first Archbishop of Canterbury. He was a monastic Archbishop and brought monks with him to Canterbury. This centralized the Roman Catholic Church in Canterbury and all England was under the rule of the Papacy.

The establishing of Canterbury was about 500 years after the birth of Christ and the birth of the Church, and about 500 years before the Norman Conquest of England by Duke William of Normandy in France. By 1066 A.D. France, too, had come under the Roman Catholic Pope, so William the Conqueror brought Catholicism with him as he conquered England. William dealt harshly with the Catholic monks and their abbots and bishops and priests. In the 500 years from the coming of St. Augustine to Canterbury to the Norman Conquest, much English land had been acquired by the Catholic Church. In some cases, the wealthy families such as ours, made great bequests of land to the Church. They left in their wills gifts of land to the Church, etc. It was at this point that our Urso d'Abitot made his great fortune, largely in the acquisition of Church lands in Worcester, where the King had stationed him as his personal representative and High Sheriff. The King granted him the Earldom of Worcester, among other gifts and titles. Much of Worcester land was directly owned by the monastic Orders. A fierce conflict developed between the monks of Worcester and the King and Urso, Earl of Worcester and probably, next to the King, the richest and most powerful man in England. This closeness of the mighty Earl of Worcester to the Sovereign did end with Urso's death. He had a son who was his direct heir to the vast estate, but the son was so hated by the Church that Urso decided to make his daughter, Emmeline, his heir. She became the wife of another mighty noble, Walter de Beauchamp. Thus was passed to the Beauchamps that closeness to the Royal Family, high titles, vast wealth in lands and gold. It was not long before the Worcester Beauchamps intermarried with another ancient family, the Lygons, when Anne Beauchamp became the bride of Richard Lygon.

In this section about the Lygons and their kin as they have related to the Church of England, it is helpful to divide the nearly 2000 years of history in England into neat sections of approximately 500 years each as the time relates to our family. Christianity, as we saw earlier, came to England very early. Less than 100 years after Christ's birth we know that Roman Legions came to England and some were Christians, newly converted to the Faith from pagan religion or no religion at all. The Church that grew out of that in England lasted in that form for almost 600 years. During this first of four periods of about 500 years each we see the somewhat casual Christian Church become the Church in England.

In approximately 500 years after the coming of Augustine, came the Conquest of England by William the Conqueror. As we have seen, he was a mighty conqueror and was rather fully in charge in England of both Church and State, though he had to acknowledge the supremacy of the Pope in matters of religion. He violated that, however, and there were clashes during the early period of the Norman Conquest, and as we have seen, our family was intimately involved in the running of England with William the Conqueror. In another approximate 500 years after the Conquest came the Protestant Reformation in the 1500's, and England was in the midst of all of this historical, political and religious upheaval. Again, our Beauchamp and Lygon ancestors in England were overwhelmingly on the side of the reigning sovereign. When the King clashed with the Church, so, likely, did our ancestors. To make a long story shorter, this was resolved with what is called in English Church History, the Elizabethan Settlement. The English Church was declared an independent Church in the sense that it had no allegiance to the Pope. At this time the Sovereign became the Titular Head of the State Church as he was the head of the Nation, and the Archbishop of Canterbury became the Spiritual Head of the Church of England. It then evolved that the Sovereign became the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The Lygons of Madresfield Court have often hosted members of the Royal Family and Church leaders.

Our ancestral family estate reflects the closeness to God and King. This is especially true in that there is a wonderful Family Chapel in the Arts and Crafts tradition, a wedding gift of Lady Lettice Grosvenor to her new husband, the 7th Earl Beauchamp. The Earl and Countess Beauchamp both were deeply devout Christians and Anglicans, and this was reflected in their home and in their many activities. Being at the top of the social and political scale, they were intimately involved with the State Religion and Church of England. They were considered Anglo-Catholic in their loyalty to the Church of England. They were also known as High Church.

We have seen earlier in this chapter something of the evolving of the State Church known as the Church of England. We have seen it grow in England from a loosely organized Christian movement in the century after the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ when England was a part of the Roman Empire, to a heavily-organized monastic Church directly under the Roman Catholic Pope and his Archbishop of Canterbury, St. Augustine of Canterbury. We have seen the Christian Church in England remain Roman Catholic from 597 A.D. to the 16th Century when the English Church split, under King Henry VIII, and declared itself to be the Church of England with no allegiance to the Pope and to be headed by the Sovereign, King Henry VIII. It became officially a State or National Church under the rule, spiritually and materially of the King or Queen of England. When Henry VIII died, he left three legitimate children. His heir was his only son, known in history as King Edward VI, who never married and died in his teen years without issue. He was succeeded by his older half-sister, Queen Mary I who reigned a short time and had no direct heirs. At her death, her half-sister, Elizabeth I became Queen of England. During that brief period of time the new Church of England went from the Catholic Henry VIII who revolted from the Catholic Church to his teen-age son, Edward VI, who died without issue in his teens, but religiously was Protestant and at his death the throne went to his half-sister Mary and then to Elizabeth. It was only then that there came to be a religious settlement in England known as the Elizabethan Settlement. Basically, the Church of

England continued to be independent of the Pope in Rome, but its theology was a mixture of Catholic and Protestant. This has been the nature of the Church of England ever since.

The Lygons in England and their allied families lived through it all. The Anglican Church, which is what the Church of England is frequently called, has always been known as a "bridge Church", forming something of a link between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches. It has from the time of Queen Elizabeth I had this strong dual nature. The terms "High Church" and "Low Church" came to be used to describe individual parishes and dioceses, and individuals within those parishes and dioceses have been so designated. The Church of England has periods in which it became corrupted by the world. As early as the 17th century during the reigns of King James, King Charles I and II especially the English Church reflected worldliness and corruption. As a result, the movement known as Puritanism arose in England. Individuals and dioceses became divided on the question of reform within the Church. Those who wanted to purify the Church morally came to be called the Puritans. They were highly critical of the Church of England and its clergy. This led to the Puritan Revolution and the beheading of the King, Charles I, the Sovereign and also the titular Head of the Church of England. The Norman Aristocracy became embroiled in the religious situation as they were, as we have seen, closely related to the Royal Family. In the period of the Stuarts, King James I was by nature a Puritan. He was the son of Mary, Queen of Scots, but she did not influence him religiously as much as his private tutor did. His tutor was a strict Scottish Presbyterian, and much of this rubbed off on the Royal Prince who became King James I of England in the early 17th century.

Under King James I, England and the State Church fell to some extent under the influence of the King's leaning toward Presbyterianism. The King ordered the Bible translated into the English language. This was a major change from the use in England of the old Catholic Bible in the Latin. It was a radical move towards making the official State Church less Catholic and more Protestant.

While the Puritan Revolution in England was influential in making England less Catholic, it later precipitated a movement in the opposite direction. This was a counter-movement to restore the Catholic aspects of the English Church and return it to being more Catholic while still remaining under the rule of the King rather than the Pope. The Lygons became prominent in this Catholic movement, known in English church history as The Oxford Movement. It was and is called the Oxford Movement because the clergy and professors there widely embraced the new Catholic movement. The Oxford Movement was going strong in the lifetime of the 6th Lord Beauchamp of Madresfield Court, Sir Frederick Lygon. Sir Frederick was an active and avid High Churchman. He was the Lord Steward of the Royal Household to Her Majesty Queen Victoria.

Sir Frederick Lygon had married Lady Mary Stanhope, an exceedingly well-connected person at Court. Although this Lord Beauchamp was the Royal Steward and thus was exceedingly close to the Royal Family, he was something of an irritant to the Queen, who was a very Low Church person. The Queen is known to have said "I much prefer the wee Scottish Kirk (a Presbyterian Church) to Westminster Abbey." This religious difference made for something of a strained relationship between Lord Beauchamp and Queen Victoria. She apparently held him in high respect as he was a very moral and religious man and so well-connected, but his "High Church" practices annoyed her. Nevertheless, Lord Beauchamp pursued his work and leadership in the Anglo-Catholic or Oxford Movement. It became a very strong movement within Anglicanism and worldwide in scope. It greatly affected the Episcopal Church in the United States of America and is still visible in this American branch of the Church of England. It profoundly affected worldwide Anglicanism. Sir Frederick Lygon's name was widely associated with it and he is given credit in history for exercising strong leadership in England in the infancy of the movement. The Lygon men were traditionally Oxford-educated, therefore well-connected.

In the Oxford Movement, the goal was to purify the Anglican Church morally so that it could missionize the world through Anglo-Catholic piety. The historic, apostolic sacraments were emphasized, the Holy Eucharist was called the Mass as in Roman Catholicism, churches were built in the neo-Gothic style to reflect the historic Catholic heritage of the Church of England. In addition, there was a strong emphasis in the Oxford Movement on acts of charity such as giving alms to the poor and needy. Lord Beauchamp became exemplary in this. He gave of some of his great fortune to the Church to found Alms Houses , and such things as housing for the retired Anglican Bishops and Priests and members of the Monastic Orders received gifts in impressive numbers from Lord Beauchamp. These charitable works are still visible in England.

Lord Beauchamp was a powerful influence in all of this because he was a deeply devout and sincere Christian and Churchman, but he and his and our family had long and deep personal ties with Oxford University where much of the movement had begun. Many of the men in the family were Oxford graduates and loyal alumni. The Anglo-Catholic piety and good works are still visible at Madresfield Court. The lovely Chapel there reflects the Oxford Movement in all its glory. The Chapel has a central and revered place at Madresfield. The Lords and Ladies of the Manor of Madresfield have been and are loyal patrons and benefactors of the Church of England.

Present and immediately-past benefactors of the Church have been Sir John Cotterell and his late wife, Lady Alexandra Cotterell. Lady Rosalind Morrison is a strong supporter of the Church of England.

The French Influence at Madresfield Court

While the Lygons in England as well as in America are so very quintessentially English, one cannot fully understand the family without being aware of the family's Frenchness. On one's first visit to Madresfield one is almost overwhelmed by the beauty of the fine antiques in the various rooms, notably the salons. The furniture is largely French and the decor is French. Much of the furniture was acquired by one of the early Countesses. Lady Beauchamp went to France and purchased many valuable French pieces from the former grand homes of the French aristocracy. The French furniture and decor seem to suit and seem at home. This is as it should be as the Lygons are so heavily French in origin. The name itself is French. The eight Earls Beauchamp bore the French name of our Beauchamp ancestors as the Earldom was granted to them. The Lygons, Beauhamps, Grosvenors and others all carry French names. The family is very Norman French and has been since the Norman Conquest in 1066 AD.

William the Conqueror and his Norman relatives and friends and supporters brought to the British Isles a strong French culture, and it has been retained and is very evident in the England of today and in the Lygon family in England and America. While it has been brought out that our Lygon family heritage also contains a strong Saxon element through the Saxon Berkeleys, who blended with the Norman Berkeleys, it should be emphasized that there has been a tendency in the English Norman Aristocracy and Royalty to remain true to the French origins since 1066 A.D.

William's Court was French-speaking, and French was used as the legal language in the newly-conquered England for a number of years and through a number of reigns. France had been a leading world force even before Charlemagne was crowned on Christmas Day of the year 800 A.D. This was a major milestone in the development of western Europe. That seminal event occurred only 266 years before the Norman Conquest of England. Charlemagne was a direct descendant of King Merovee who founded the Merovingian Dynasty in the 5th century of the Christian Era. The Frankish tribes in what is now France were organized by this dynasty and became the nucleus of the Western European Empire which was built on the foundations of the former Roman Empire. It became the Holy Roman Empire because Charlemagne was a Christian. The Merovingian kingdom was built on the ashes of the Roman Empire and the King took the place of the Roman Emperor. Western monarchy was born and it was Frankish. This was the beginning of the French nation and the French people and the French Royalty and Aristocracy. King Merovee and his descendants, including Charlemagne developed the French customs and French speech which dominated Royalty and Aristocracy in the new Western Empire. William the Conqueror sprang from this royalty and aristocracy.

The Frenchness which dominated the West through the centuries leading up to the Norman Conquest became the most powerful political and religious force over a vast area of what is now modern western Europe. It was all held together by strong leadership of the organized Christian Catholic Church. The Pope and the Bishops and Priests and Monks worked closely with the Royalty and Aristocracy in the formation of western civilization based on the feudal system. The system was based on the ownership of land and serfs. Wealth was produced by the control of land and the control and use of forced labor. Our ancestral home, Madresfield Court, is a living example of the feudal, manorial system, inherited from our French ancestors. Madresfield still has a moat, most likely created by serfs on the manor of Madresfield. For centuries, Madresfield, as a working manorial establishment, carried on the system brought into England by the great William the Conqueror. Remarkably, the original land of the de Bracys, first owners of the manor whose daughter married a Lygon and thus Lygons became the Lords of the Manor, has been preserved intact, for the most part, and thus, the old feudal, French and early English systems and laws have preserved the family and its connection with the land. The Lygons in England have survived and have endured.

The graciousness of spirit and warm hospitality which has been evidenced in the English Lygons since the Norman Conquest in inviting the Royal Family on numerous occasions to feel at home at Madresfield Court has been extended to their American cousins. In the 1930's, the 7th Earl Beauchamp, Sir William Lygon extended a welcome to Daniel Ligon of Virginia to spend a summer vacation at Madresfield. Lord Beauchamp opened the Muniments to his American cousin. The result was a wonderful transference of historical records to the American branch of the family which resulted in Volume I of *The Ligon Family and Connections* and which is continued in this, Volume IV. Not only was the history of the English family shared, but both English and American branches became close relatives in mutual affection for each other. We have become one great family through those early efforts at getting to know each other. The Ligon Family and Kinsmen Association was born as were regular family gatherings in both England and America. We are rare as a family in this. We have become one great family separated by 3000 miles of ocean but one in spirit and one in family love.

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