

Sir Dudley Digges

Dudley Digges was born in Kent, England, around 1583, the child of Thomas Digges and Ann St. Leger of Digges Court, Barham. He attended Oxford for one year and graduated in 1601. He was knighted by James I in April 1607.

By 1609 he was associated with the venture to Virginia, being a subscriber to the Second Charter of the Virginia Company, which was approved in 1609. While there is no evidence that Sir Dudley or either of his oldest two sons, who together with him were in 1612 members of the Virginia Company, ever went to Virginia, the fact that he was closely following the stories from Virginia is evident in that he was a member of the group which in 1612 bought the Bermudas from the Virginia Company. His deep interest in finding the fabled northwest passage resulted in Henry Hudson's 1610 expeditions' leaving his name in today's Canadian Northwest Territories on the Digges Islands. Digges Hundred among other particular plantations on the Upper James River was already in the records in 1611.

Sir Dudley was a member of Parliament, intermittently between 1610 and 1626 for Tewkesbury, and in 1628 for Kent. He was an active member of the Muscovy Company, and in 1618 at the direction of the king he undertook to negotiate a loan requested by the Emperor of Russia. In 1620 he served as a commissioner for the East India Company in an unsuccessful attempt to negotiate a settlement of disputes between the English and Dutch East India Companies.

While he contended vigorously with the crown on behalf of political freedom and helped in the creation of the Petition of Right, he accepted from the crown in 1630 the promise of the office of Master of the Rolls when it became vacant. He had been admitted to Gray's Inn in 1618 and became Master of the Rolls in 1636.

He married Mary, daughter of Sir Thomas Kempe and his wife Dorothy Thompson, and through this marriage acquired the manor and castle of Chilham, and together they built Chilham into an impressive home. They had eleven children, only one of whom came to Virginia. This was their son Edward. Sir Dudley died on 18 March 1639.

Edward, who had been born in March 1621 at Chilham, emigrated to Virginia and in December 1650 purchased 1200 acres of Captain John West near Yorktown. Three years later he patented another 3050 acres on the north side of the York in Gloucester County.

Edward was appointed to the Council in November 1654 and was elected two years later by the House of Burgesses to be Governor in which post he served from March 1655 until December 1656. He then went to England to join Richard Bennett and Col. Samuel Mathews as an agent for colonial affairs. He married Elizabeth Page, probably the sister of Col. John Page, the founder of the Page family in Virginia. Edward and Elizabeth had five children and he died 15 March 1676. His wife died in 1691.

References:

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