

Croome Collection Coventry Family History

George William Coventry, Viscount Deerhurst and 7th Earl of Coventry

Born 28th April 1758, the son of George William (6th Earl) and his first wife, Maria. He succeeded as Earl in 1809, at the age of 51. He eloped to Scotland with Lady Catherine Henley, 4th daughter of Robert Henley, 1st Earl of Northington, a former Lord Chancellor and the last person to hold the title of Lord Keeper (c.1760-79), in late 1776. Upon their return to England his father arranged for the errant couple to be remarried in Worcestershire in 1777. Catherine died in childbirth in 1779 and George William later remarried to Margaret 'Peggy' Pitches, daughter of Sir Abraham Pitches, a wealthy brandy merchant from Streatham, Surrey. Together they had five sons: George William (later 8th Earl), John, Thomas Henry, who died an infant, another Thomas Henry (named after his brother who died) and William James, and five daughters: Augusta Margaretta (who later married Sir Willoughby Cotton), Georgiana Catherine, Jane Emily, Barbara and Sophia.

In 1776 George William became an ensign in the 64th Foot Regiment and by 1777 had risen to the rank of lieutenant in the 17th Light Dragoons. Immediately after his first marriage George William set sail to fight in American War of Independence. Only a few weeks after his arrival he sold his commission for £500 and returned home. In 1780 he was tragically blinded in a hunting accident. Around 1800 he purchased an estate at Streatham. Here he had part of the house demolished and commissioned James Wyatt to build him a fashionable villa, later known as Coventry Hall. In 1808 he succeeded his father as Lord Lieutenant and Custos Rotulorum for Worcester, and from 1809 served as Recorder of Worcester and High Steward of Tewkesbury.

From the 1820's onwards the 7th Earl's health began to fail. The Countess Coventry took over responsibility of running the estates. The Earl also gave her control of his bank accounts, an indication that he knew that he would lose control of his mental processes. His physical and mental state declined to a critical level, and George William died 26th March 1831.