

**SIR DUDLEY DIGGES**  
**owner of Chilham Castle, Kent**  
19<sup>th</sup> May 1583 -18<sup>th</sup> March 1638/9

*Sir Dudley Digges[did] write his Will with his own hand in the Parlor of Chilham Castle*

*He was so much declined when he made the Codicil that it was wrote in his Chamber by John Wyborne his servant and dictated by Sir Dudley*

*He died in March 1638 about 10 days before the year 1639 [in fact on 18th]*

*Last of all since I cannot establish the Charities I intended by Deed I do thus by Will declare myself that those Lands mentioned in my former Will I do now by this my codicil give wholly to my son Thomas Digges but I do charge the same And all the lands which I have power to charge in Chilham with an Annual rent charge of Twenty pounds to be paid by my Heirs the Owners of those lands every 25<sup>th</sup> March to the Churchwardens of the Parish Church of Chilham who out of the same shall yearly repair the little burying place I there built and then on 19<sup>th</sup> day of May they shall give to the Young Men of Chilham who shall ring a peal in remembrance of me the sum of 20s for their Dinner which done whatsoever shall remain of the £20 aforesaid shall be distributed between twenty Poor Men twenty poor Women and twenty poor Children of the Parish of Chilham such as take no Alms or Allowance from the Common Purse and such as would have yearly nominated by the advice of the Lord of the Manor the Vicar of the Church for the time being the Steward of the Court there or some or one of them. Finally whereas part of the manor of Selgrave in Faversham did by escheat fall unto me and was also purchased by me of the Heir of Sir Christr Cleeve Knt which I have been contented the Lady Cleeve shall enjoy during her Life my Will is that after her Death the Profits thereof be converted to this Charitable use First I would have the same let to some honest Tenant paying over and above the quit rents only £20 by the year and so soon as there is £20 raised then my Will is that the Lord of Faversham with the advice of four of the Jurats and the Lord of Chilham or in his absence the Vicar of Chilham with the advice of four of the best freeholders shall choose a young man and a young maiden of good conversation between the ages of 16 and 24 and these two young men and the two young Maidens on the 19<sup>th</sup> shall run a Tye at Chilham and the young man and also the young Maid that shall prevail shall each have £10*

*Be so kind as to turn the page*

## **Please note overleaf**

In a codicil to his will of 1638, an afterthought, Sir Dudley Digges laid down that £20 should be set aside from the quit rents of 40 acres in the Manor of Selgrave – his recent acquisition between Faversham & Sheldwich. This bequest provided prize money for “*a tye*” or race to be run at Chilham each year on 19<sup>th</sup> May, anniversary of Sir Dudley's birth, when he directed also that the church bells should be rung in celebration - Sir Dudley was no shrinking violet !

Competitors would be “*a young man and a young maiden of good conversation between the ages of 16 and 24*” chosen by “*the Lord of Chilham [Sir Dudley's successors] or in his absence the Vicar, with the advice of four of the best freeholders*” and a couple chosen by “*the Lord of Faversham or in his absence the Mayor, with the advice of four of the Jurats*”

*“the young man and the young maiden who should prevail, should each .....have £10”*

At the north corner of Mountain Street is a plodgy quagmire known as Running Field Mead, adjoining which, it is believed, was the original “Running Field” where in 1869-70 Charles Stewart Hardy dug a lake.

In 1728 James Colebrooke excluded the plebs from this land (acquired recently from Col Thomas Digges) by diverting the northern stretch of Mountain Street & erecting a high wall along the new boundary. No artifacts dating from after the 17<sup>th</sup> century have been found by metal detectors on this site.

In later centuries, eliminating heats for the Chilham pair took place at Old Wives Lees on 1<sup>st</sup> May on the land still called the Running Field, and, for the Faversham pair, on the following Monday on Sheldwich Lees.

In 1790, Edward Hasted wrote in his History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent (volume III page 139) that this running was still kept up on Old Wives Lees “among a great concourse of the neighbouring gentry and inhabitants, who constantly assemble there on this occasion”

Thomas Heron who owned the castle at that time tried unsuccessfully to abolish the ancient tradition because he was disturbed by reports of rollicking behaviour.

The races continued until about 1850 when according to Matilda, daughter of James Beckford Wildman (Heron's successor) the final was on the racecourse at Wye, where girls and boys competed “in very scanty attire”

Wildman persuaded the charity's administrators that the money would be better spent on prize-giving at the village school, a project which he fostered keenly.

Charles Hardy, who followed Wildman, arranged for the prize money to be applied to general school funds, since when the ancient tradition has become no more than a memory.

Michael H Peters  
March 2012