

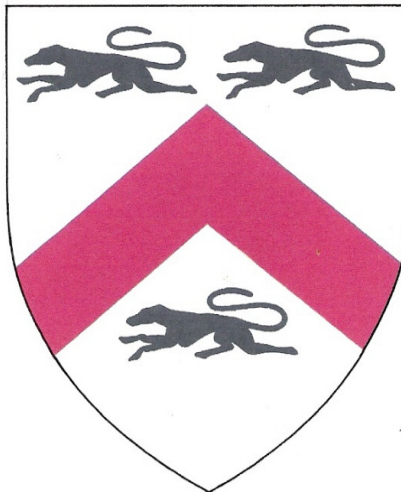


SIR JOHN GAINSFORD

Tudor Knight of Crowhurst Place 1469 - 1540

The Gainsford family held land at Crowhurst since the reign of Edward III when a John Gainsford and his wife Margery took over the manor from John de Stangrave in 1338. There followed a long line of Johns, Sir John being the seventh.

Sir John's great-grandfather, also John, built Crowhurst Place. His will indicates a man of considerable wealth and records a great deal of silver plate 'worth the equivalent of 400 acres of good land'. The land was divided amongst his three sons: William, who founded Blockfield Manor and Old Surrey Hall in Dormansland; Nicolas who founded a manor at Carshalton and John, who inherited Crowhurst and was Sir John's grandfather. He and his father have elaborate tombs in Crowhurst church.



Gainsford Coat of Arms

We are not sure when Sir John Gainsford was born, but it was probably around 1469. During his life he was married six times and had twenty children – fifteen daughters and five sons.

Sir John was appointed Sheriff of Surrey at least three times, in 1500, 1517 and 1533; this was at a time when there were only four Justices in the whole of Surrey and so Sir John must have been quite a notable in the county.

He also appears to have been well established at the court of Henry VIII and is reputed to have assisted the king in his intrigues with the Boleyn girls at Hever. Tradition has it that the king often slept at Crowhurst Place on his way to Hever. Although initially one would wonder why the king would bother given the close proximity to Hever, it is recorded that Henry often used Penshurst as a base when he was courting Anne and so he may well have also stayed at Crowhurst.

Sir John's daughter Anne, by his second wife, was Lady-in-Waiting to Anne Boleyn and became Protestant to please her mistress. Sir John, however, although he always acknowledged the supremacy of the king, seems to have kept his head down, kept in the king's favour, remained and died a Catholic

Being a knight could be a financial burden as well as an honour. In 1520 Sir John was appointed to attend the king and queen at the event popularly called the 'Field of the Cloth of Gold'. This was the first meeting of Henry VIII and Francis I of France which took place in France just outside the English-held town of Guines near Calais. For two weeks the English and French kings attempted to outshine each other with extravagant clothes and jewels, lavish tents and spectacular feasts, jousts and games. This event did little to cement the alliance between England and France and cost a fortune, which nobles and gentlemen were obliged to fund. The courtiers blamed Cardinal Wolsey for the ruinous expense to which they were subjected.

The following year in 1521 Sir John Gainsford was one of 17 jurors (which included Thomas Boleyn of Hever) at the trial of the Duke of Buckingham (Edward Stafford of Penshurst) who had been one of the loudest complainers about Cardinal Wolsey. The duke was on a trumped-up charge of dabbling in astrology, found guilty and executed; and so Wolsey obtained his revenge.

During his tenure as Sheriff of Surrey in 1533 Sir John wrote to Thomas Cromwell commenting on the amount of crime that had occurred lately in the hundred of Tandridge. He writes despairingly '.... I cannot tell how poor men shall live in quiet, for within these two years more unthrifty deeds have been done in the hundred of Tanredge than have been done in the whole shire.... We hope to have your aid in punishing such murders and crimes, for if they continue I would rather forsake the shire.'

In 1539 Sir John, along with his brother Nicholas and another Gainsford cousin, was again appointed to a jury, this time at the trial of Sir Nicholas Carew, who held the manor of Beddington and was charged with high treason; this time at the behest of Thomas Cromwell. He too was found guilty and executed.

After a string of at least ten daughters, in 1513 Sir John finally had a son and heir, Thomas, by his fourth wife Joan Polliver. Thomas married a woman called Agnes Ailoff of whom Sir John does not seem to have had a very high opinion. In 1539 he wrote to Sir William Kingston, Controller of the Royal Household about his daughter-in-law '...I married my son thinking it should have been to my comfort, but she is of evil conversation and he put her away...' (it is not explained quite what this meant!). He goes on to ask if his son Thomas could gain employment in Sir William's service.

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However, years later Sir John married Agnes' widowed mother, Awdry, thus becoming Thomas' father and father-in-law at the same time!

In 1540 after a lifetime serving his king Sir John Gainsford died, aged 71 and was buried at Guildford, where he had another manor. He was succeeded by his son Thomas. Later, on Thomas' death the estate was passed to his half-brother, Erasmus, Sir John's son by his sixth wife, Grace Warham.

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Sources:

Surrey History Centre, Woking

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Crowhurst Place in 2008