

Sketch: The Lamb Family at Rye in East Sussex County England

Pamela Hutchison Garrett, 2018

As I was researching and working to understand more about the family of James Lamb (iii) and Catalina Mathews, who married in 1778 in Flatbush, New York, I came across several intriguing stories about the Lamb family at Rye in Sussex county England.

James Lamb (iii) was the son of James Lamb (jr) and Anne Morris, and the grandson of James Lamb (sr) and Martha Grebell; the Lamb family being of long-standing prominence in the village of Rye in East Sussex county England. Young James Lamb (iii) was christened in 1755, and, in 1774 he shipped out with the 35th Regiment of Foot to serve with British troops during the American Revolutionary War. During his time in British occupied New York City, he met and married Catalina Mathews, the daughter of David Mathews, then Loyalist Mayor of New York City. Toward the close of the war, James Lamb returned to England to set up housekeeping with his American born bride. They must have returned to the Lamb family enclave because the christenings of their first sons are recorded at the parish church in Rye, county Sussex, England in 1782 and 1784. I have only located a few specific details about James Lamb (iii) and his wife Catalina Mathews, but the internet is replete with stories of the Lamb ancestors at Rye.



Lamb House, Rye, Sussex, England

Author Keith Spence, in his 1999 'The Companion Guide to Kent and Sussex', writes colorfully of the town of Rye, and of Lamb House, the home of James Lamb (sr), that is today owned and managed by Britain's National Trust. I am sharing a brief portion of Spence's article here, and include several links for further reading at the close of this sketch.

Rye had its share of famous visitors in pre-tourist days. Queen Elizabeth came there on a royall progress 1573, and, according to tradition, was so pleased with her welcome that she granted the town the right to call itself "Rye Royal". A century and half later George I came to Rye a good deal less willingly. Early in 1726 he was blown ashore on Camber Sands and made his way to Rye, where he stayed four days with the mayor, James Lamb, in Lamb House, and stood godfather to Lamb's child, who was born the night of his arrival. By this time smuggling was in its heyday. It was still flourishing when in 1773 John Wesley preached to the people of Rye, who were quite "willing to hear the good work", but in spite of all his powers of persuasion "will not part with the accursed thing smuggling:. Not surprisingly, as smuggling was highly profitable, and Rye might have been built for that purpose, with vaulted cellars below many of the houses for storing contraband, and interconnecting attics so that a smuggler could make his getaway below the eaves while the exciseman was hammering on the door half a street away.



Rye has been an artist's delight since Van Dyck sketched it in the seventeenth century. In the twentieth century Paul Nash and John Piper painted on Romney Marsh, and Edward Burra lived in the town, nicknaming it 'Tinkerbelletown' for its Never-Never-land air of unreality. It produced its own famous literary figure in the dramatist John Fletcher, born in 1579 possibly in the building call Fletcher's House (now tearooms) beside the church. But its greatest literary ghost is an American, the novelist Henry James, who fell in

*love with Rye at first sight, and from 1897 until two years before his death in 1916 lived at Lamb House (National Trust). This superb Georgian house, looking down a quiet cobbled lane, had been built by James Lamb shortly before George I's surprise visit; and its comfortable opulence exactly suited Henry James. The small garden building where he wrote *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl*, booming out their rolling sentences to his secretary, was destroyed by a direct hit in 1942. A later and far more entertaining novelist who lived in Lamb House was EF Benson, Mayor of Rye between the wars, whose *Mapp and Lucia* stories chronicled the waspish intrigues, backchat and scandal of the town.*

James Lamb, the builder of the house, founded a family which ran Rye for well over a century, holding the office of mayor almost nonstop and in strict control of the parliamentary voting in those days of small electorates and rotten boroughs. In 1742 he was involved in Rye's most notorious murder case – the killing of Allen Grebell by John Breeds or Breads, a 'sanguinary butcher'. Breeds had been fined by

Lamb, who was mayor at the time, for giving short weight. Burning with resentment, he lay in wait for Lamb late one night in the churchyard, and stabbed a figure he thought was the magistrate with his butcher's carving knife. However, it was not Lamb at all, but his brother-in-law Allen Grebell, who had borrowed Lamb's cloak for the evening. Breeds was soon arrested, as on the evening of the murder he had been roaming about the streets shouting that 'butchers should kill Lambs', and his bloodstained knife was found lying in the churchyard. He was hanged, and left to rot on a gibbet, which can be seen upstairs in the Town Hall. Only the skull is left; the rest of the skeleton was removed by superstitious old women, who boiled up the bones to make an infusion against rheumatism.

Do you want to know more?

[Link to Catalina Mathews in the database](#)

[Link to James Lamb in the database](#)

Further Reading:

[Rye, East Sussex, from wikipedia](#)

[Lamb House, from wikipedia](#)

[Lamb House, Henry James and E F Benson, from the Rye Museum](#)

[The butcher who tried to kill a Lamb; Posted by sussextalks on April 23, 2017](#)

About the photos:

Lamb House Rye, Sussex, England; August 2010; Velvet; GNU Free Documentation License.

Ryepanorama; View from the tower of St Mary's church, Rye, East Sussex, southern England. The white-painted building is the Methodist church. The Ypres Tower in the centre-left marks the cliff-edge which defines the citadel. Below the cliff, roofs of buildings beside the River Tillingham can be seen, with yacht masts beyond. The river joins the River Rother and winds across Romney Marshes to the English Channel; 3 May 2006; JackyR; GNU Free Documentation License.

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