**RICHARD COCKS**

**Baptised St Chad’s, Seighford, 20 January 1565**

**Died at sea off Java, 27 March, 1625**

Richard Cocks was the second son of Robert Cocks, a yeoman, whose family had lived at Stallbrook Hall, Derrington, since for at least a century. Cocks’s oldest brother, John, would inherited the house and its lands, leaving Richard Cocks to seek his fortune. There were five other children: Jerome, Majory, Joan, Walter and Francis. The terms of Richard Cock’s will suggest that Jerome was retarded; Marjory is known to have married William Staresmore, rector of Frolesworth in Leicestershire. In 1617, Richard would use his powerful connections to seek a wardership at the Tower of London for Walter.

As a youth, Richard Cocks left Seighford for London to take an apprenticeship with William Hewett (or Hewet), an influential member of the Worshipful Company of Clothworkers with family connections in Stafford. Walter later followed the same route. William Hewett’s brother, Thomas, also a Clothworker, was an investor in the Virginia Company. Both Hewetts were later knighted.

Richard Cocks duly became a Freeman of the Merchant Adventurers, that is, the body exporting English cloth overseas. From 1603 -1608 he lived in Bayonne, France, selling of English wool into the Pyrenees. Midway through this period he was taken into the secret service of the Earl of Salisbury, King James I’s chief minster. It was Cock’s role as ‘intelligencer’ to spy on English Catholics heading to Spain, and Roman priests attempting to enter England.

Failing to secure a consulship in France, Cocks returned frustrated to England, but was able to enter the service of the East India Company, whose Governor, Sir Thomas Smythe (pronounced ‘smith’) knew Thomas Hewett well, Smythe also being Governor of the Virginia Company. Salisbury was also close to Smythe and may have been instrumental. It was at the time that the Privy Council was informed of Cocks’ excellent service, in the words engraved on this monument.

In spring 1611, Cocks sailed with the East India Company’s Eighth Voyage, under the command of John Saris. It was intended for Yemen, India and – if possible – Japan. Four vessels departed, and though failing in Yemen and India three took good ladings in South-east Asia, and headed home. Just one, the *Clove*, went on to Japan where Saris, Cocks and the other Englishmen set foot in June, 1613.

Although not the first Englishmen in Japan, they were the first to come officially, to negotiate trading rights with the shogun, Tokugawa Hidetada, and his all-powerful father, Ieyasu, and to give them letters and presents from King James. They were successful, and Saris returned to England on the *Clove* that winter. Cocks was left to establish and run the English trading station, or ‘factory’, which spread out into all major Japanese cities, as England’s first and chief trader in Japan. However, in 1616, a change in shogunal policy led to restrictions on foreign trade, and thereafter profits were hard to find. The Company shut the Japan factory (also that in Siam) in 1623, and Cocks left. Although King James had asked to meet him on his return, Cocks died at sea.

At the top of the monument are the arms of the East India Company, in whose employ Cocks travelled to Japan, and whose factory he ran there for ten years.

The Cock family were not armigerous, but Richard used a seal with five mullets is saltire, which is produced here. Since English heraldry uses mullets with five points and these have six or eight points, they may have been fashioned for Cocks in France (in Japan he referred to possessing a fine ring commissioned in France, and it could have been a sealing ring). The seal of the cock was used by one of Cocks’s brothers, probably John.

This monument was erected by

*Japan400*

a body formed to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Japan-British relations which falls in 2013.

It was dedicated by the Bishop of Stafford on Sunday 24 November, 2013,

being the nearest Sunday to opening of the English Factory in Japan,

of which Cocks was Chief Factor,

on 26 November, 1613.