

A CURIOUS TALE

January 2024

March 1720 saw the birth of **George Edgcumbe (1720-1795)** #15106 on the web family tree, who decided to follow a career in the Navy. He did well and gained command first of a 20-gun ship and soon one of 50 guns. Following action in the Seven Years War he was transferred by Admiral John Byng to the *Lancaster* having 66 guns and subsequently to the *Hero* with 74 guns.

Until 1864 the Royal Navy was organized in three divisions known as Red, White, and Blue in that order of seniority. A Captain on being promoted to Flag Rank first became Rear-Admiral of the Blue then of the White and finally of the Red. The same process applied to Vice-Admiral and to Admiral. In 1864 the divisions were abolished; the White Ensign was retained and all Flag Officers were placed on the same list. By 1778 George had risen to become an Admiral of the White.

In May 1761, on his brother's death he succeeded to the title of **Baron Edgcumbe** and later that year he married **Emma Gilbert (1729-1807)** #15108, the only child of **John Gilbert DD, Archbishop of York** who sadly died three days after the wedding. Despite having been at sea for long periods he became the holder of many honours and appointments including being Lord-Lieutenant of Cornwall and in 1789 he was created Earl of Mount Edgcumbe in the County of Devon.

After 18 years as George's countess, Lady Emma died and was laid to rest in the family vault. Someone, possibly a corrupt sexton, knowing that she had been buried with a valuable ring on her finger, that evening exhumed her body to steal the ring. Unexpectedly, he was not able to slip off the ring so took out his knife and cut into her finger. The countess suddenly sat up; she had not died but had been the victim of premature burial. She went immediately into the house where she surprised her family at dinner!

Further research tells us that this story of premature burial has been popular in European folklore since the 14th century. Versions have been found to exist in nearly every European country. Some versions tell us that the robber dies of fright; that her family think she is a ghost and refuse her entry; that she lives on and bears children and that her husband dies of fright upon seeing her.

Research at Mount Edgcumbe fails to establish that the story is anything other than a curious tale.