

SIR ROBERT GEFFERY

Sir Robert Geffery's School, the Geffery Hall, Geffery Close... and so it goes on. Who was this Robert Geffery ?

Of all those born in this parish of Landrake with St. Erney, Sir Robert Geffery is the most famous for his distinguished record in the City of London in the 17th Century.

He was born at Tredinnick Farm, which runs alongside the River Tiddy. Although there is no known date of birth, he was christened on the 24th May, 1613. Very little is known of his early life - What made him leave the small farm his parents worked to go to London ? As a boy he may have been interested in the many small boats that sailed up and down the Tiddy past his farm, and talking to the sailors on board he may have wished to seek his fortune elsewhere.

His life has been compared with that of Dick Whittington who went to London and made his fortune. But what job Robert Geffery actually did is not definite. He had ties with the East India Company that carried out trading with the Far East. Perhaps that was where he made his fortune.

In 1646 he was admitted into the Livery of the Ironmongers' Company, rising to become the Master of that Company in 1667. This was the highest honour this great Livery Company could bestow on him.

In 1673 he became Sheriff of London and also that year received the honour of a Knighthood thus becoming, Sir Robert Geffery.

He was nominated as Master for a second term in 1685 and then became Lord Mayor of London in 1686. This position made Sir Robert one of the most important and influential men in the country as most of the wealth of England was going through London at that time.

Sir Robert Geffery died on the 26th February 1703 at the age of ninety one. He must have been a very rich man when he died because he left considerable money and property to various charities. He was buried in the Parish Church of St Dionis, Backchurch, in the City of London, in which parish he had resided for many years. To the Ironmongers' Company he gave £400 on trust, 'to invest the same and pay the income to the Rector of St. Dionis to read prayers twice every day of the week'. This was the custom of the rich in those days, hoping that by so doing, they would be sure of a place in Heaven. He also directed that 'failure or neglect in reading the prayers for a space of three days, the income should be paid to the Royal Hospitals of Bridewell and Bethlem', of which he had been President. - In 1876, the Church of St. Dionis was pulled down. The remains of Sir Robert and his wife were moved to the burial ground of the Company's Almshouses in Kingsland Road, Shoreditch, and the legacy of the £400 was paid over to the Royal Hospitals. In 1911, this Shoreditch site was sold to the London County Council, who retained the

buildings and converted them into a museum called The Geffrye Museum which has on display period clothes and furniture.

In St. Michael's Church, Landrake, there is a tablet with part of Sir Robert Geffery's Will inscribed and this makes interesting reading. 'Two shillings a week was to be laid out for bread for the Poor Inhabitants of Landrake and St. Erney, and distributed to them by the Churchwardens for the time being after the morning service'. This generous act finished in 1964 as the Churchwarden at that time, Mr F Barrett, found that no-one came to collect it on Sunday mornings, although he could remember in harder times when there was a waiting list of eager applicants to obtain the penny rolls. The PCC at that time approached the Ironmongers' Company in order that the money be directed to some other cause. They wanted to have the views of the Parish Council on this matter before finally agreeing that the bread distribution be stopped. Today, the money that was used to provide the bread can be given to any deserving family in the parish.

Another legacy mentioned on this tablet concerns the payment to a schoolmaster. £520 each year was to be paid so that the children of the poor inhabitants could be taught to 'Write and Read English and to learn and be instructed in the Church Catechism, now used and appointed in the Church of England.' Today, the Worshipful Company of Ironmongers' make up half of the Governing body of the Sir Robert Geffery's School and take a major interest in its running. In 1991 the present building was opened with a large financial input by the Ironmongers' Company, while in January 1999 the new extension, consisting of a computer classroom and a pre-school unit, was opened with their financial backing.

Should Sir Robert Geffery come back today, he surely would be delighted with all that has gone on in Landrake. All thanks to this local boy who made good and remembered his village.