



The Hundred Parishes

Introduction to a famous local person . . .

RICHARD RICH (c1496 – 1567)



Sir Richard Rich, Baron Rich of Leez, held powerful positions under four monarchs. He entered London's Middle Temple as a lawyer in 1516 and became a Member of Parliament in 1527. He was knighted by Henry VIII in 1533 and went on to also serve Edward VI, Mary I and Elizabeth I.

In 1536 he was appointed the first Chancellor of the Court of Augmentations, dealing with the revenues from the dissolution of the monasteries. It is said that it is in this role that he amassed his great fortune by

purchasing land in Essex at very favourable prices. Thus he acquired, amongst others, the manors of Felsted and nearby Leez (or Leighs). Henry VIII's will granted Rich a barony and he took the title of Baron Rich of Leez. He rebuilt and extended the small priory at Leez and made it his home.

Felsted School was founded by Rich in 1564. He provided a stipend for a priest to be chaplain and schoolmaster and, with the support of an usher, to teach 80 boys "in lernying of Grammar and other vertues and godly lernying according to Christes religion". The original school was housed in a converted guild hall with shops below. This building is still used today as the Preparatory School Music Department. Felsted's almshouses were founded by Rich in 1565.

Rich played a key role in the trial of Sir Thomas More, securing his conviction and execution. More had been Lord Chancellor to Henry VIII. In the 1966 film "A Man for All Seasons", Rich is portrayed as a villain, his part being played by John Hurt.

Baron Rich died in 1567 and is buried in Holy Cross Church, Felsted, where an elaborate 13ft (4 metre) canopied monument (shown above) depicts Rich in the robes and cap of Lord Chancellor, a position he held under Edward VI from 1547 to 1552.

Further information:

www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=51753

Richard Rich, the Man Who Kept His Head, a novel by Elizabeth Engebretson
Some aspects of the life and political career of Richard Rich, E. McIntyre.