



THE PEERAGE IN QUESTION
THE HERBERTS, EARLS OF PEMBROKE
FRIDAY 30 SEPTEMBER

The Herbert family, Earls of Pembroke in an almost unbroken line since the 15c, and still resident at Wilton House near Salisbury, has included poets and murderers, art collectors and architects, philanderers and leading members of government. The dynasty was founded by William Herbert, known as 'Black William', son of William ap (of) Thomas, founder of Raglan Castle and appointed First Earl of Pembroke of the Eighth Creation by Edward IV in the Wars of the Roses. William the 3rd Earl was Chancellor of Oxford University and founder of Pembroke College, had Shakespeare's First Folio dedicated to him, and may be the 'Fair Youth' of the Sonnets. He smoked pipes heavily to keep his migraines at bay. His brother Philip the 4th Earl quarrelled violently with the Earl of Southampton after a game of tennis, and at the height of his career struck Lord Matravers with a cane in the House of Lords. He had interests in several colonial ventures in Virginia and the West India Company, rebuilt Wilton House in the latest Palladian style of Inigo Jones, and was a leading parliamentarian in the Civil War. He was a renowned patron of art, particularly of Van Dyck, and of literature, including that of his kinsman George Herbert the metaphysical poet. His descendant the 7th Earl was a convicted murderer, subject to fits of homicidal mania, whom Charles II committed to the Tower of London "for uttering such horrid and blasphemous words, and other actions proved upon oath, as are not fit to be repeated in any Christian assembly". The 9th Earl by contrast was the architect of Marble Hill in Twickenham, and one of whom Horace Walpole wrote that 'no man had a purer taste in building'. The 12th Earl married a Sicilian princess, whose father imprisoned him in a fortress; he escaped to England, to be sued by the princess for £5000 a year, went into exile in the Place Vendôme in Paris and sired seven children. George Herbert a kinsman is renowned as the Earl of Caernavon who helped discover the tomb of Tutankhamun.