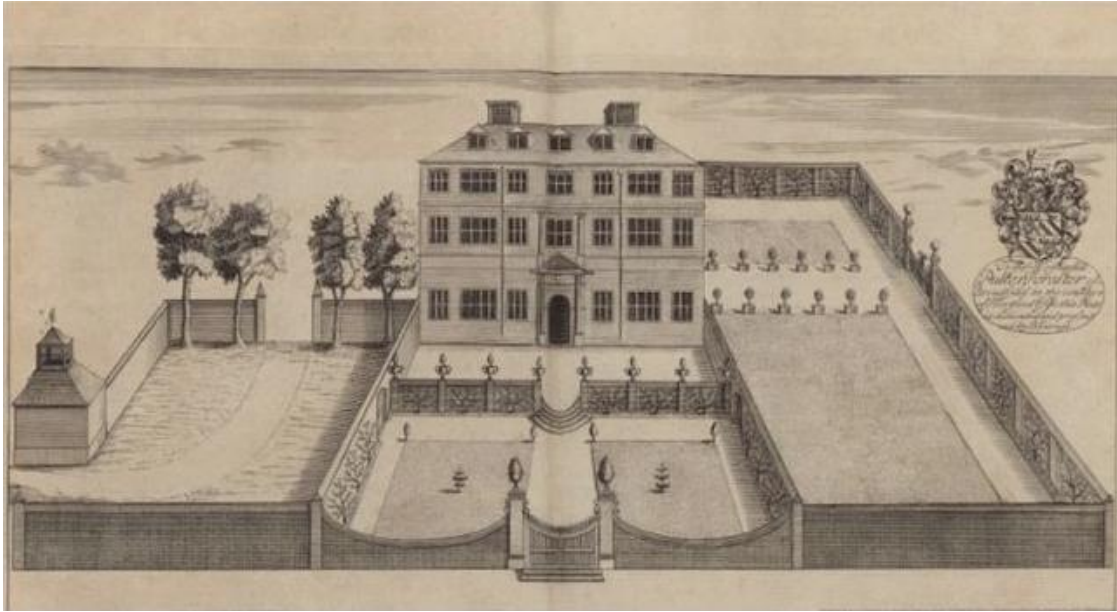


# Lady Hester Pulter (1605 - 1678)



*“That many things revolve thou mayest explore  
And when thou dost dissolve it is no more,  
For so this earthly transitory mound  
In an eternal motion still runs round.”*

Last year I received an email from an American academic, Professor Wendy Wall of Northwestern University in Evanston, north of Chicago, querying whether I could help with some research work that she was doing on the C17th poet, Hester Pulter. Were there any relevant memorial stones in Cottered Church? As a still newly arrived parish priest I had not heard of Hester Pulter and, when I asked neighbours and friends, no one in Cottered seemed to have heard of her either. Wendy however reassured me that Hester Pulter had made a lasting contribution to English literature and pointed me to her own research project ‘The Pulter Project’ available online. Thus I began to learn about another notable character who lived within one of our own village communities and whose writing in recent times has taken the academic world by storm.

In 1996 a ‘lost’ manuscript was discovered in the Brotherton Library in Leeds. The manuscript contains 130 poems and some 30 pages of a prose romance written by Lady Hester Pulter under the pseudonym of the Noble Hadassas, a

biblical reference to Esther. Since the discovery, her literary fame has gone from strength to strength.

It is believed she was born in Dublin in 1605. Her father, James Ley became the first Earl of Marlborough in 1626. Hester married Arthur Pulter whilst still a young adolescent and lived the rest of her life at Broadfield Hall. The Civil War proved to be a difficult time for the Pulters. Arthur hung on to a pragmatic neutrality; Hester's voice was unequivocally for the King, as is reflected in some of her poems. Revolution and strife in the outside world became a metaphor for her own internal suffering and melancholic state, a consequence of witnessing 13 of her 15 children die. Such trauma led to her seeking consolation in her writings and in a worldview that clung to an understanding that ultimately God holds all things in his hands. She believed passionately in the circle of life and death and in this understanding found a meaning to life that endured. The above lines from her poem, Circle 3 give expression to her own articulating of that faith. She would surely have rejoiced in the circular patterns of the later C19th floor tiles now in place in the sanctuary of Cottered Church.

Pulter's poems are beautifully written. Her use of language connects with a woman's struggle to give vent to her feelings of what it means to have lived in a time and a place in history dominated so much by the chauvinism of Roundhead and Cavalier alike. What she writes has for so long lain hidden from view, like much of her own personal anguish, yet is now being explored in the light of day by our own generation who are learning to appreciate her literary gifts in ways in which she would never have thought possible, and to value in ways she would never have believed.

It was a real pleasure to welcome Professor Wall to Cottered in July this year as she made her own personal pilgrimage to Cottered to walk in the footprints of our newly discovered heroine of the pen. Discover Hester Pulter for yourself at <https://pulterproject.northwestern.edu/>

*Revd Mark Bailey*