

Ruthin School

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Established 1284

Principal: Mr T J Belfield MA (Cantab)

Founders' Day – 9th May 2015

Sir John Trevor

Today, I would like to speak to you about a historical figure, Sir John Trevor, an old Ruthinian from the 17th century.

For years, one of the school Houses was named Trevor after Sir John. This tradition will be continued with the new girls' boarding house with 40 bedrooms to be completed by September 2016 to be named Trevor House.

John Trevor was born in 1637 near Chirk to a family that belonged to the local gentry. The exact dates of his attendance of Ruthin School are unknown, but it can be presumed that he was a pupil of the school during the political upheavals of the English Civil War, which saw Charles I executed in 1649.

He started his legal career during Cromwell's republican Commonwealth of the 1650s, and became a judge in 1661 immediately after the restoration of the Stuart monarchy. Trevor entered the House of Commons in 1673 as a Tory, supportive of the Stuart King James II. He was elected the MP for Denbighshire and had to fight a duel with the losing candidate. In 1685, he was elected Speaker of the House of Commons and also appointed Master of the Rolls, one of the highest judicial posts in the Kingdom. As Speaker, he was noted for his squint, which confused MPs trying to catch the Speaker's eye so as to be called to speak in debates. The Glorious Revolution of 1688, which saw King James deposed and William of Orange accede to the English throne, brought difficult times for Trevor. His political allegiance as a Stuart royalist led to his being stripped of his offices.

He was described as having grotesque features, in addition to his hideous squint, which were far beyond the reach of caricature, by the eminent Victorian historian Macaulay. Gambling and betting were his chief amusements, from which he earned as much money as from his profession. However, he proved to be an adept political survivor, being respected as a highly capable jurist, and was reinstated as Speaker of the Commons by 1690 and as Master of the Rolls in 1693. His career was brought to an abrupt downfall in March 1695 by a corruption scandal.

Trevor was found to have accepted a bribe of 1000 guineas, approximately equivalent to over 1.5 million pounds today, for aiding the passage of a bill through Parliament. He admitted being guilty of "high crime and misdemeanour", and was forced to step down as Speaker. Sir John remained the most recent Speaker to be stripped of his office for nearly three centuries, until the resignation of Michael Martin in 2009. Nonetheless, he retained his position on the Privy Council, and in the judiciary, which he held until his death. An influential figure in Denbighshire, he was a generous benefactor to local society including Ruthin School, having amassed a large fortune of 60,000 pounds, amounting to about 90 million today, by his death in 1717.

Sir John Trevor was clearly a very colourful figure but his talent for survival in difficult times and his legal prowess are undisputed.

B Choi

9th May 2015