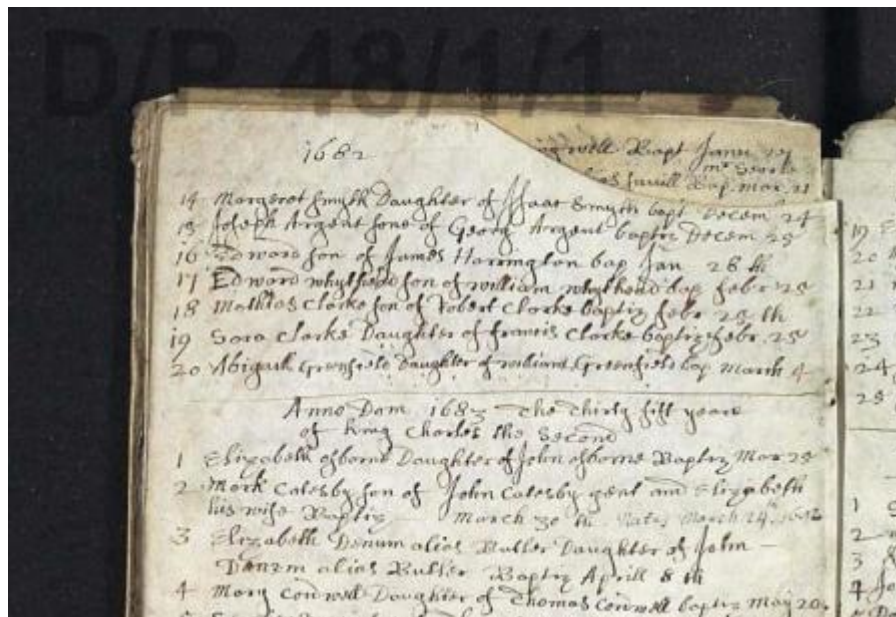


Mark Catesby (1683-1749) – a great Hedingham naturalist and artist born 340 years ago this month.

Mark Catesby was born ‘about the 24th March’, 1683, in Castle Hedingham, the 4th child and youngest son of Elizabeth Jekyll and John Catesby, a lawyer deeply involved with the political life of Sudbury. As shown by the Church record below, Mark was baptised in St Nicholas Church, Castle Hedingham, on the 30th March 1683. His mother was a Jekyll, daughter of Nicholas Jekyll of Sheepcot House, Queen St, Castle Hedingham. Nicholas had 7 children, all baptised in the church and he lived in the village where he developed a notable botanic garden and was friendly with a circle of outstanding local naturalists, including John Ray, Samuel Dale and Francis Willughby.

Extract from the Baptisms, Marriages and Burials for St Nicholas Church 1682/83



The young Mark Catesby often visited and stayed with his maternal grandparents. He was thus mixing with some great pioneers of botanical science who regularly came to Castle Hedingham to meet with his grandfather to discuss botany and examine plants in his garden. Both the renowned naturalist John Ray and Samuel Dale, the famous Braintree Apothecary and Physician, were friends with Jekyll. Catesby would have had access to John Ray's scientific work through the library of Samuel Dale, who took the young Catesby under his wing and became an enduring patron of his work. George Edwards, the Essex naturalist and ornithologist with whom Catesby worked closely in the 1740s knew of his friend's early acquaintance with Ray and said 'it had inspired in him, a genius for natural history'



Sheepcot House, Chapel Green, Castle Hedingham



Crested Titmouse and Upright Honeysuckle

Catesby soon began to extend his horizons beyond Castle Hedingham and Sudbury. In 1712, Catesby, a young man of small but independent means travelled to the newly established capital of the Virginia colony, Williamsburg, where his sister and her husband Dr William Cocke had a medical practice.

This was the first of his two expeditions to the American colonies:
Virginia and Jamaica 1712-1719
Carolina and Florida 1722-26.

He resettled in London thereafter and worked on his drawings and observations until his death in December 1749.

Catesby's work is contained in the 220 etchings and drawings of American flora and fauna, now part of the Queen's collection in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle. It is fundamentally a visual work and Catesby explicitly argued for the importance of illustration as the most effective means of conveying the natural world. The drawings have been housed in the Royal Library since 1768 when they were purchased by George III.

Catesby executed his drawings in watercolour and gouache and he claimed he produced his botanical studies from freshly gathered specimens. Back in England he transposed his original field drawings into etchings and was particular about harmonised compositions of related fauna and flora.

Bison Americanus : Pseudo Acacia 1754



Catesby's art was part self financed by his work, after his return, as a horticulturist at nurseries in London. He became a prominent importer of American flora and distributed plants to his friends.

'The Pseudo Acacia and Bison', is a typical Catesby picture and specimens like this tree would have arrived back in England often to the nursery of Thomas Fairchild in London. The False Acacia tree at Rushley Green, Castle Hedingham could well have its origins in this transportation and still stands today as one of the oldest tree specimens in the parish.

The Baltimore Bird and the Tulip tree

Today in the USA, Catesby's achievements are more recognised than in the UK. As an explorer he was the first to conduct a critical study of the southeast colonies of North America; as a scientist he was the first to empirically observe and recognise the natural and man-made dangers impacting species' survival; as an artist his meticulous paintings and etchings of birds, other animals including fish and plants capture the natural beauty of colonial America. This exceptional man, baptised in St Nicholas Church, has now the newly opened Mark Catesby centre at the University of South Carolina to 'bring attention to the innovative work and influence of this 17th century English Naturalist.' A memorial panel has also been recently installed in St Giles Church Cripplegate, London, Catesby's parish church during the time he was creating his history of Carolina, Florida and the Bahamas Islands.

His lineage both back and forwards in history also directly links his Castle Hedingham origins with Robert Catesby, the Gunpowder plotter and with Gertrude Jekyll, the great garden designer of the late 19th and early 20th century.

The Eastern Bluebird – *siala sialis*



All pictures - Mark Catesby's drawings of American Flora and Fauna in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle