

A vicar has discovered, to his surprise, that he has family links stretching back centuries to the parish where he is now ministering and even to the local castle.



Revd Peter Doodes in Herstmonceux and Wartling, East Sussex, began his 'Who Do You Think You Are?' journey after an email came from relatives in Australia.

The email came from a family member on his mother's side who had traced their genealogy. He said: "When I journeyed through the story [of my family], I noticed, much to my amazement, that there was a lot about [my local area] Herstmonceux, Herstmonceux Church, and Herstmonceux Castle."

Although born in the East End of London, Revd Peter Doodes is now firmly rooted to the south coast. He is Assistant Priest at his benefice, takes services in Ashburnham Chapel, and was a volunteer Beachy Head Chaplain for four years. However, he had not realised that his roots were much deeper than his current role.

Pressing his relation in Australia, Revd Peter Doodes discovered he was related to "the nobility families of Dacre and Fiennes."

The aristocratic link came as quite a shock for him, having left school aged 14 with one qualification before becoming a motor mechanic.

He said: "Both names are major and integral parts of the history of Herstmonceux Castle, the Church of All Saints Herstmonceux and the local area over many hundreds of years.

"The tomb of the two Sir Thomas Fiennes, father, and son is situated where I have, unknowing of my relationship to them, robed for services over the last five years. This tomb being in the Dacre Chapel in Herstmonceux Church.



“However, the two figures that are on top of the tomb, are not of the two Fiennes family members that are in the tomb. These are of the Lord Hoo’s family members, and these were once in Battle Abbey. Incidentally, and by seeming coincidence, I live in the nearby Village of Hooe.

“Lord Thomas Hoo once possessed the Manor of Wartling, and I am also privileged to take services in the Church of Mary Magdalene Wartling.

“Lord Thomas commissioned an illuminated religious Book, a ‘Book of Hours of the Sarum Use’. I studied theology at Sarum College Salisbury, and not only that, Lord Hoo’s daughter, Anne Hoo, married Sir Thomas Fiennes.

“Sometimes I think to myself that things were meant to be.”

The links are not just historic. Members of the Fiennes family still live in the local area and Revd Peter Doodes added. He said his daughter-in-law has a close friend – who is now known to be a distant relative – who is part of the Fiennes clan.

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