

The Gurney family of Norwich

Keswick Hall was a former residence of the influential Gurney family of Norfolk. The **Gurneys** of Norwich were an influential family of English Quakers who established Gurney's bank in 1770 and had a major influence on the development of the city. The bank merged into Barclays in 1896.

History of the family

The Gurneys were descendants of Hugh de Gournay, Lord of Gournay, one of the Norman noblemen who accompanied William the Conqueror to England. Large grants of land were made to Hugh de Gournay in Norfolk and Suffolk, and a younger branch of this ancient family held certain manors in Norfolk in the time of King Henry II.

In the 17th century, John Gurney (1655–1721) left his hometown of Maldon for Norwich to live and work among the Quakers of the city. Arriving in Norwich in 1667, he became active in the woollen trade. In 1687 he married Elizabeth Swanton (d 1727) of Woodbridge, by whom he had eight children. He died as a wealthy man in 1721 and was buried in "the old Dutch garden that the Friends had bought as their burial ground, the Gildencroft or Buttercup Field," on the land John Gurney had been given to tend when he first arrived in Norwich. His sons John (1688–1740) and Joseph (1691–1750) continued in the woollen trade through businesses in St. Augustine's Street and Magdalen Street, respectively. Both brothers married and had numerous children.

John Gurney's sons, John (1719–1779) and Henry (1721–1777) gradually added banking transactions to their woollen trade. In 1770 they entered into partnership and formally established Gurney's Bank in 35 Tooley Street (now Pitt Street) in Norwich. When Henry died in 1777, he was succeeded by his son Bartlett (1756–1802), who also took over his uncle John's responsibilities and moved the banking business to Redwell Plain (now Bank Plain) in Norwich. The Quaker bank became renowned for its honesty, reliability and fair dealings and so people entrusted the Gurney family with their money for safekeeping. Bartlett Gurney was married twice, but died childless at Coltishall, Norfolk, in 1802. He was succeeded in control of the bank by Richard (1742–1811) and John Gurney (1749–1809), grandsons of Joseph Gurney (1691–1750).

Keswick Hall was the residence of Richard Gurney (1742–1811), his son Hudson and many other members of the Gurney family.

Richard was married to a daughter of David Barclay, another Quaker merchant and banker. Their six children included Anna Gurney, the Old English scholar, and Hudson Gurney (1775–1864), who later inherited a fortune from his father and acted as the head of the Norwich Gurney family. He became M.P. for Newtown in 1816, a fellow of the Royal Society in 1818 and High Sheriff of Norfolk in 1835.^[4] He lived at Keswick Hall near Norwich, and in St. James's Square, London. He remained childless, and his fortune was inherited mostly by John Henry Gurney Sr. (1819–1890).

Earlham Hall, was the residence of John Gurney (1749–1809) and childhood home of his daughter Elizabeth Fry.

John Gurney (1749–1809) and his wife lived at Earlham Hall in Norwich which they rented from the Bacon family. They had 13 children, of whom several died young. Those who survived included the bankers Samuel Gurney and Daniel Gurney, the social reformers Elizabeth Fry and Joseph John Gurney, while Hannah married Sir Thomas Buxton. Another sister was Louisa Hoare, the writer on education. In the 19th century, the Gurney family was known for its wealth: In Gilbert and Sullivan's 1875 comic opera "Trial by Jury", a character describes his accumulation of wealth until *at length I became as rich as the Gurneys*.^[5]

On John Gurney's death in 1809, his son Samuel Gurney (1786–1856) assumed the control of Gurney's Bank in Norwich. About the same time, he also took over control of the London bill broking business of *Richardson, Overend & Company*, whose title was subsequently changed to *Overend, Gurney and Company*. It went on to become the world's largest discounting house for 40 years until it failed – ten years after Samuel Gurney's death – in 1866 with liabilities of 11 million pounds sterling. The failure of *Overend, Gurney and Company* ruined a number of the Gurneys, as well as numerous investors. Gurney's Bank in Norwich, however, escaped significant damage to business and reputation from the collapse of the London billbroking business.

The Times stated: *It is understood that the suspension of Overend, Gurney & Co will not in the slightest degree compromise Gurney's Bank of Norwich. That establishment recently passed into the hands of new partners, whose resources are beyond all question.*

Gurney's Bank in Norwich was at that time in the hands of Samuel Gurney's brother Daniel Gurney (1791–1880) and Joseph John Gurney's son John Henry Gurney Sr. (1819–1890). The latter had inherited Hudson Gurney's fortune in 1864. He later made his home Northrepps, near Cromer, where he pursued ornithology. His son, John Henry Gurney Jr., was also an ornithologist, and his great-great-

grandson, Henry Richard Gurney of Heggatt Hall, has continued that family tradition.

Besides managing his banking business, Daniel Gurney served as High Sheriff of Norfolk in 1853 and took an interest in archæology and genealogy. In 1848 he printed in two volumes for private circulation an elaborate work entitled 'The Record of the House of Gournay,' to which he added a supplement in 1858. Daniel Gurney was married to a daughter of William Hay, 17th Earl of Erroll and lived near North Runcton, Norfolk. Their son Charles Henry Gurney (1833–1899) graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge, married a daughter of Henry Thoby Prinsep, and later became a partner in Saunderson's Bank, London. The Gurneys remained active in banking until 1896, when eleven private banks controlled by Quaker families joined together under the name *Barclays* to meet the competition of the joint stock banks. The largest component parts were *Barclay Bevan Ransom Tritton Bouverie & Co*, of Lombard Street in the City of London, Backhouse's Bank and Gurney's Bank.

The principal seats of the Gurney family were Earlham Hall (rented from the Bacon family) and **Keswick Hall near Norwich**, as well as Heggatt Hall and North Runcton. Earlham Hall is today occupied by the Norwich Law School, a part of the University of East Anglia.

Following the bombing of Norwich Training College on April 29th 1942, it was Quintin Gurney, the then Chair of the college's governors, who offered Keswick Hall as a suitable home for the college. Keswick Hall accommodated the Norwich teacher training college from 1948 to 1981, prior to being converted into apartments.

Many members of the Gurney family are buried in the Gildencroft Quaker Cemetery, Norwich, and some in Keswick All Saints churchyard, near Norwich, as well as in Intwood churchyard, also near Norwich.