

## Early Industrial Espionage: John Lombe, George Sorocold and John Erskine, the 6th Earl of Mar.

P.H.Tunaley, 10th October 2024

(updated 18th December 2024)

### Unlocking the George Sorocold and John Lombe mysteries.

*(Background: George Sorocold disappeared from records 1716; John Lombe, half-brother of Thomas Lombe, died in mysterious circumstances 1722 ; Henry Lombe, brother of Thomas Lombe, shot himself June 1723; the biographer, William Hutton, who provided an account of the Old Mill proceedings, wasn't born until September 1723).*

Since the previous article dated August 2024 was published, fresh evidence has been uncovered which throws a different light on the possible fate of George Sorocold following his visit to France in 1716.

John Erskine, the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Mar, Secretary of State for Scotland under Queen Anne and a key figure in the Act of Union of 1707 was politically snubbed by George 1st following the latter's arrival in England to take up the throne in 1714. Possibly as a consequence of such humiliation, Mar then became a key figure in the September 1715 Jacobite uprising.

In April 1716, the Stuart papers confirm George Sorocold as having arrived in Fontainebleau, France, in an attempt to meet with the exiled John Erskine, 6th Earl of Mar (1675-1732) then resident in Avignon.

The reason(s) as to why Sorocold made this journey one can only speculate. No record has been found of Sorocold being alive after what may well have been a failed attempt to meet the Earl. Nor has any Sorocold burial record been found. Sorocold's visit does, however, show some mark of desperation given his journey may have been regarded by some as that of a traitor.

The disappearance of George Sorocold does of course leave open the question as to who was responsible for the subsequent construction of the Old Silk Mill in Derby.

Much information to indicate the reality of the John Lombe contribution towards its construction may differ significantly from the events as described by the biographer William Hutton. And that the Earl of Mar may have played a key role in those events.

Details as follows::

1. The lack of a date of death or burial record for George Sorocold.
2. His legal dispute with probable father-in-law, the Derby apothecary William Franceys. Plus other litigation documents containing the name George Sorocold.
3. His journey to France and attempt at a meeting in April 1716 with the Jacobite John Erskine, the 6th Earl of Mar (from the Stuart Papers). George had previously carried out work for the Earl of Mar at the Gartmorn Dam, Scotland, 1711 – 1712.
4. His disappearance from records following his attempted 1716 meeting in France with the Earl.
5. The Earl of Mar's move to Rome as an advisor to the exiled "James 111" (from the Britannia website):

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Erskine-6th-earl-of-Mar>

Other documents informing that the Stuart Court was in Pesaro (Italy) from the spring of 1717, moving to nearby Urbino 1718 and then to Rome.

Sources: *"The Jacobite Government-in-Exile,"* by Professor Edward Corp (University of Toulouse); *"Music at the Stuart Court in Urbino 1717-1718"* by same author.

6. The possibility that the Earl of Mar was a double agent (from the National Archives website):

<https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/the-jacobite-earl-of-mar-a-double-agent/-:~:text=On%20the%20death%20of%20Queen,th>

7. The lack of solid evidence that John Lombe worked in Piedmont as stated by the biographer William Hutton.

*Mr. David Purdy, has kindly provided copies of tax records indicating that John and Thomas Lombe were both living, 1716 and 1717, in Devonshire Square, London, close to the silk weaving area of Spitalfields. With John Lombe disappearing from these records by 1718.*

*These records also showing John Lombe living in Wide Gate Alley 1713 and 1714, also close to Spitalfields, thus casting doubt on claims that John Lombe served an apprenticeship or spent any length of time in Italy.*

8. Claims made, without supporting evidence, informing that construction of the mill started around 1715.

*In fact an item dated 11th October 1718 in "The Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post" (a paper existing 1716-1725) indicates that such work had commenced some time as late as 1718. (copy of item kindly supplied by Mr. David Purdy)*

9. The absence of records that would indicate which company or companies in England made the thousands of parts needed for the construction of the Old Silk Mill.

10. Should all parts have been imported from any of the states or kingdoms of Italy as existed at the time, the question as to whether John Erskine, the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Mar, and his agents were primarily involved.

Plus a more plausible explanation that the parts were manufactured neither in Italy nor England but secretly in Alloa, Scotland, the town Mar had developed industrially from 1702. With this explanation requiring only that someone (John Lombe ?) brought over the blueprints from Italy. And with the one person having the necessary contacts to achieve this: John Erskine the 6th Earl of Mar.

N.B. John Erskine, 6th Earl of Mar, twice Secretary of State for Scotland under Queen Anne. He later became known as "Bobbing John" because of his changes in allegiance.

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