

Robert Andrews (1725–1806)

Robert Andrews, landowner and subject of a painting by Thomas Gainsborough, was born at Bulmer, on 10 November 1725, the son of Robert Andrews (1661–1735) and his fourth wife, Martha.

He was baptized at St Andrew's, Bulmer and educated at the grammar school at Sudbury and at University College, Oxford.

On 10 November 1748 he married Frances Andrews [*née* Carter] (1732–1780) at All Saints' Church, Sudbury. Frances was the only daughter and heiress of William Carter of Ballingdon House, Sudbury, and his wife, Frances, daughter of a rich Huguenot cloth merchant, Claude Jamineau.



Mr and Mrs Andrews
by Gainsborough

Gainsborough and Andrews would have met as children as both reputedly attended Sudbury grammar school. The artist had recently returned to Sudbury after a decade in London and the commission from Robert Andrews marked their reacquaintance. Robert and Frances Andrews are shown posed beneath an oak tree (which still exists) in the park at their estate, The Auberies,

a hundred yards to the south-east of the house looking towards Cornard Wood on the Suffolk side of the Stour valley. The Auberies sits high above the valley, and shown on the extreme left of the painting is the eighteenth-century tower of Holy Trinity, Long Melford, that was rebuilt in 1900.

To the right of the oak, the trees part to reveal the tower of All Saints', Sudbury, where the couple had been married, and further to the right, on the Essex side of the river, are thatched barns at Ballingdon Hall and chalk pits at Middleton.

Robert Andrews is shown wearing hunting dress, holding a gun with a hound; his wife by his side.

In the field the yield appears good, with ripe corn stooks regimented in the field, and beyond a flock of sheep are enclosed behind a hurdle fence. The agricultural activities shown in the painting show the scope of the estate during the year and the painting affirms Robert Andrews's right to the land by virtue of diligence and industry.

Robert Andrews's high standards were noted by the agricultural writer Arthur Young who, in June 1784, considered him to be 'one of the most careful and practical farmers I have any where met with'.

Hugh Prince comments: '*The Means of production are taken for granted, the crop of wheat, the venerable oak, fat sheep, wild partridge and everything else are appropriated by the landowner who stands complacently in front of his accumulated assets...Mr and Mrs Andrews are too soft skinned and unsuitably dressed to have toiled in the fields or even to have supervised others in doing so and none of the people employed in producing their good fortune appears in the picture.*'

Robert and Frances Andrews had six daughters and three sons, born between 1751 and 1769, naming the first two Frances and Robert. Frances senior died on 22 October 1780 and her death is commemorated by a touching memorial tablet [here] in St Andrew's Church, Bulmer.

Robert Andrews and his second wife, Mary had no further children. Robert Andrews died on 20 May 1806 and was buried with his first wife in St Andrew's Church, Bulmer. Following his death the estate was sold and the proceeds divided between his children. The Christies sale catalogue described the estate as 'admirably disposed for the Purposes of Agriculture, which is very skilfully practiced'.

Hugh Belsey (former curator of Gainsborough's House)