

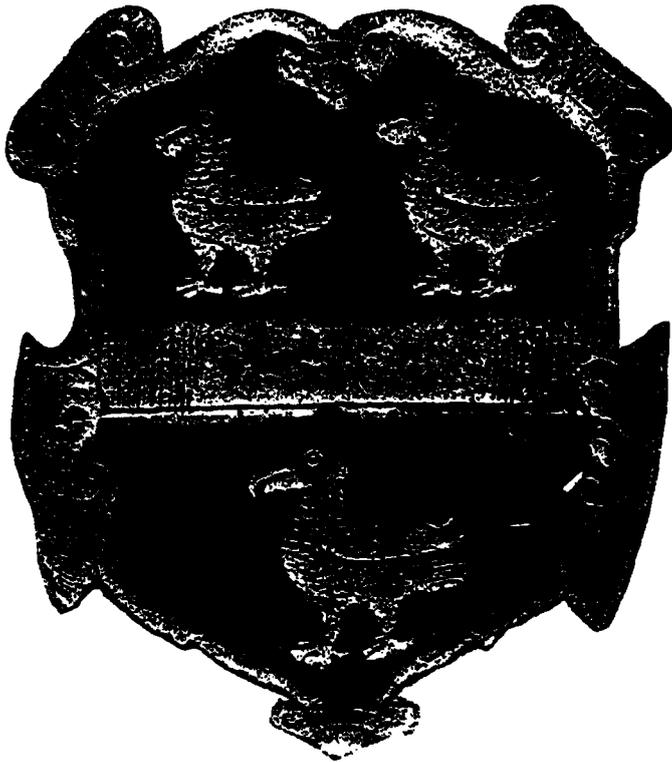
THE SHELDONS

*Being some account of the Sheldon Family of
Worcestershire and Warwickshire*

BY

E. A. B. BARNARD

M.A., F.S.A., F.R.HIST.S.



Arms of Sheldon

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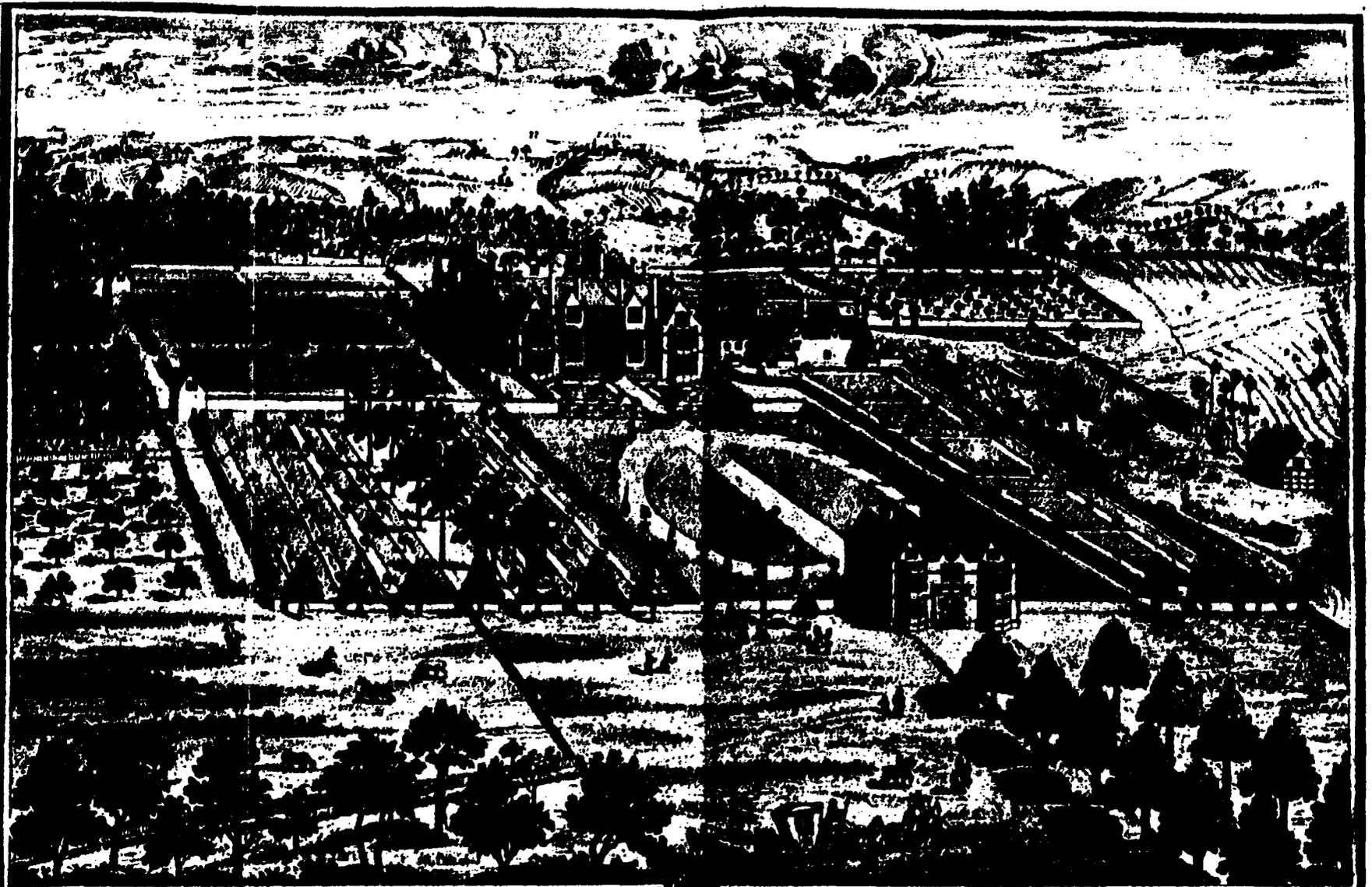
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THE SHELDONS



The South-east Prospect of Wiston in Warwickshire, the Seat of Edward, the Duke of

WESTON IN 1716

N O T E

THIS book has been compiled on behalf of Mrs Rees Price, of Broadway, Worcestershire, as some memorial to her husband, Rees Price, F.S.A., F.S.A. Scot. (d. 13 June, 1930), whose devotion to the Sheldons was first inspired by his friend, John Humphreys, F.S.A. (Birmingham), one of the pioneers of research in connection with the Sheldon tapestry-weavers and their work.

For some years Rees Price, in conjunction with the late A. F. de Navarro, F.S.A., also of Broadway, had been concentrating on local documentary researches, their hope being to collaborate in writing a history of that well-known village with which, and with its immediate neighbourhood, one branch of the Sheldons had been so closely associated in the 16th and 17th centuries.

With this end in view I was asked by my two friends to undertake such researches further afield, at the Public Record Office; The Bodleian Library, Oxford; The British Museum; Birmingham Reference Library; and elsewhere, the result being that a large collection of additional material was obtained, but it still remains for the actual Broadway book to be written.

Later on Rees Price expressed a wish that similar research-work should be undertaken concerning the Sheldons, which was done, and also added consider-

NOTE

ably to the information already collected as concerning that interesting and widely-spread family, and particularly the Sheldons of Beoley and Weston, and the Sheldons of Broadway.

During these researches (1920-4) we were also visiting all parts of the Sheldon country—in Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire—and it was when upon one such excursion that the sad state of the Sheldon chapel and vault in Beoley church, to which fuller reference is made in Chapter VIII, stood revealed to us.

In compiling this book my aim has been briefly to assimilate, from the results of the researches, all important details concerning the more prominent and interesting of the Sheldons of Worcestershire and of Warwickshire, and as far as possible to avoid genealogical matters. Such material will be found, together with abstracts of legal proceedings, wills, etc., in the collection of Sheldon Miscellanea shortly to be deposited at Birmingham Reference Library, together with the Broadway Miscellanea.

In this Library there is also, thanks in the first place to the interest of Mr J. Harvey Bloom, a very important collection of 832 Sheldon documents (deeds, court rolls, account rolls, wills, etc.) relating to their Worcestershire and Warwickshire estates, and ranging in date from *c.* 1400 to 1800. They relate, for the most part, to Beoley, Brailes, and Studley, and in a lesser degree to Oldberrow and Tanworth.

Grateful acknowledgments are made to His Grace

NOTE

the Duke of Buccleuch for permission to reproduce the portrait of Henrietta Maria Sheldon; to Mr W. A. Clark (Birmingham) for his excellent photographs of the Sheldon tombs in Beoley church; and, for assistance in many ways, to Mr H. M. Cashmore (City Librarian), Mr H. Woodbine (Senior Assistant), Mr C. H. Thompson, and other members of the staff of Birmingham Reference Library; to Mr A. G. B. Russell (Lancaster Herald) and Mr A. J. Toppin (York Herald), of the College of Arms; as also to the Rev. N. G. Bearder (Brailes), Mr A. C. Coldicott (Henley-in-Arden), Rev. E. Cruickshank, Mr and Mrs H. B. Greey (Beoley Hall), Mr A. Mahler (Beoley), Mr H. E. Palfrey (Hagley), Mr S. B. Russell (Broadway), Mr and Mrs F. E. Taylor (Winderton), Lady Throckmorton (Coughton Court), Professor A. J. B. Wace, Mrs Warriner (Weston Park), Mr F. C. Wellstood (Stratford-upon-Avon), Mrs Whitmore-Jones (Chastleton), and Mr N. F. Woodward (Evesham).

E. A. B. BARNARD

Cambridge
August, 1936

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PART I

*THE SHELDONS OF BEOLEY
AND WESTON*

Chapter I

THE FIRST SHELDONS

JOHN SHELDON, of the Sheldons of Rowley, co. Stafford—a family originating in the Warwickshire parish of Sheldon—was the first of the family to be associated with a Worcestershire estate, Abberton, some six miles from Pershore, in the reign of Henry IV, when he leased that manor from the Abbot and Convent of Pershore. His son, Ralph, the first Worcestershire Sheldon to be associated with Beoley—with which delightful place, lying high on the border of Warwickshire and some two miles north-east of Redditch, the family was to remain so long and so honourably connected—married Joyce Ruding, an heiress descended from a family of considerable antiquity in the county, with whom he became possessed of several other properties therein, being also at Beoley, and at Feckenham, Hanbury, and Martin Hussingtree.

Later on, in the reign of Edward IV, William, the eldest son of the aforementioned Ralph and Joyce Sheldon of Abberton, purchased the actual manor of Beoley of Richard Neville, Lord Latimer, to whom it had come by the marriage of his grandfather, George Neville, Lord Latimer, with Elizabeth Beauchamp.

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The Beauchamps had long held the manor, of which Thomas Habington, the Worcestershire historian, writing in or just before 1643* says: "Coming to the mannors which weare purchased by the Earles of Warwicke, Beoley presentethe it sealfe as the fyrst and worthyest, a Lordshyp in former ages fortified with a castell, the Churche mounted on a hyll in the myddest of a large parcke replenyshed with deere, inryched and grand with tymber and woodes, and lastly the manor attended with tenants wanteth nothings concurring to greatenes."

This William Sheldon—described as of Balford Hall, in the parish of Beoley, esquire—was a devoted adherent of the House of York, and consequently it is not surprising that his presence at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, on the side of Richard III, caused the victorious Henry VII to deprive him of all his estates, which were afterwards restored to him.

In 1486 he was living at Beoley, in which year he was admitted into the Guild of S^t Anne of Knowle, Warwickshire. He died without issue in 1517, and was buried in Beoley church, where there is his simple tomb—originally tinctured, and still bearing traces of colour—which was set up in 1600, by his descendant, Ralph Sheldon, together with an inscription† near at hand, in the chapel which he had lately completed.

* *A Survey of Worcestershire*, Vol. 1, p. 68 (Worcs Hist. Soc.).

† Cf. Habington, *op. cit.* p. 75; Nash, *Worcestershire*, Vol. 1, p. 69.

THE FIRST SHELDONS

William Sheldon's very brief Latin will* is at Somerset House, and therein he makes bequests to the churches at Beoley and Abberton, and to Pershore Abbey. All his lands, etc. he bequeaths to his next brother, Ralph, who greatly increased the estates and local connections of the family, then quickly becoming one of the most important and affluent in a wide district. He married a Warwickshire coheiress, Philippa, daughter of Baldwin Heath, of Fordhall, Wootton Wawen.

The eldest son of this Ralph and Philippa Sheldon was William Sheldon, probably born in 1500—there is no record of the actual date†—and destined to become the greatest of all the Sheldons of Beoley and Weston, indeed of all the Sheldons. The second son, Baldwin, founded the Broadway branch of the family; Thomas, his brother, was seated at Childswickham (co. Gloucester), close to Broadway; and another brother, Francis, was now at Abberton. Apparently, according to the inscription on the above Ralph Sheldon's tomb, also in Beoley church, there had been two other sons whose names are not given, and five daughters, at least two of whom married into local families. One of these appears to have given considerable trouble to the widowed mother and others, if we may believe some proceedings in the Court of Star Chamber‡ to which this need be the only reference.

* P.C.C. 35 Holder.

† There is no record of his baptism or of his marriage.

‡ Henry VIII, 20/94 and 25/197.

THE FIRST SHELDONS

It would seem that Ralph Sheldon lived at Abber-ton for the greater part of his life, and there he died in 1546. His wife, Philippa, only survived him for some two years, probate of her undated and interesting will*—in the course of which amongst other plate she leaves to William, her son, “a bason and a ewer of sylver and xiiij spones wth the picture of posceles† where- of one ys doble gilte”—being granted on 30 January, 1548–9.

Ralph Sheldon had been buried in Beoley church, and the aforesaid tomb was also set up there in the chapel, together with the inscription,‡ by Ralph, his grandson, in 1601, a year later than the monument, abovementioned, to the first William Sheldon of Beoley. The Ralph thus commemorated had made his im- portant will on 28 March, 1545, and as coal was not in common use until the reign of Charles I this will, § in its course, supplies an interesting reference to it. The testator says:

“I do will and geve to William Sheldon my sonne all suche Colles as be gotten at Colle Orton”;|| and William Sheldon, in his own will made some twenty-

* P.C.C. 23 Populwell.

† Apostle spoons, usually of course a set of twelve, the handles being adorned with representations of the Apostles. There are instances of single spoons in which Our Lady or a patron saint is represented. Probably, therefore, such a spoon made up Philippa Sheldon’s set to thirteen.

‡ Habington, *op. cit.* p. 75; Nash, *op. cit.* p. 69.

§ P.C.C. 28 Alen.

|| Cole Orton, in the north-west of Leicestershire, is in a district still connected with coal-mining, especially at Coalville.



TOMB OF RALPH SHELDON (d. 1546) IN BEOLEY CHURCH

THE FIRST SHELDONS

five years later also refers thus to this matter: "Whereas I have compounded with M^r Winter and the Earl of Huntingdon to make a sough or drain in Cole Orton to get coals therefrom, my executors to continue making the same as the coal will be beneficial to my heirs and a great commodity to a great number of the Queen's Majesty's subjects to have the said coals at reasonable prices for their fuel, my son, Ralph, to have the issues of my Manor of Cole Orton and of the said Coal mine, in taile maile, with contingent remainders."

Doubtless it was in connection with this scheme that the Abbot of Pershore and Ralph Sheldon talked when, in April, 1538, they "fell to other communication", after their rather heated conversation at Pershore, to which further reference is shortly made, and of which the contentious subject was changed to a certain "mine of coals, whereby there followed a pretty matter to be noted".

As the 16th century advanced, so the financial troubles of a large number of the monasteries increased, and this state of affairs was the opportunity for the wealthier laymen who had money to lend. Pershore Abbey was hard pressed, and here was a good chance for Ralph Sheldon, who thereupon entered into various transactions with the last Abbot, John Stonywell, which were not of the pleasantest. The Abbot—who it was alleged, amongst other things, had not even been able to pay a debt owing to Sheldon for eleven steers,

THE FIRST SHELDONS

and for capons, butter, milk and cream bought for the conventual household when he was installed Abbot—was perforce in an unhappy position in having to raise money, and Sheldon was not, to say the least of it, an easy man with whom to deal. Of these transactions much might be written, for there are many relevant documentary evidences extant.

Only a brief period shall be considered. After 1535 the differences between the Abbot and Sheldon would seem to have been more or less composed, or possibly through sheer necessity the Abbot had been obliged to grant the lease of certain conventual lands at Broadway, which was the point at issue just at that time. However this may be, trouble began to brew again in April, 1538, as is evidenced by information* made to the Lord Privy Seal—Thomas, Lord Cromwell, who had recently been appointed—by one William Harrison, a so-called groom of the King's Privy Chamber but actually a spy, of words spoken by the Abbot whilst seated at his own table upon the Feast of the Annunciation a few weeks before, and alleged to be of treasonable import, thus:

That the Abbot in conversation with one Mr Rauff Sheldon at dinner began speaking of the suppression of the Abbey of Lantony...when Sheldon said: "O good Lord, what a gift hath God given unto the King and his noble Council now to perceive the usurpation of the Church where-with we have be[en] long deluded and mocked and in especial in the usurpation of the Church of Rome!"

* *Cal. Letters and Papers: Henry VIII*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, pp. 303-4.

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“Ah,” said the Abbot, “be you come thereto and I have loved you so well, and taken you for so true a man and so substantial a man. Well, well, I will love you no more; but whatsoever you say, I wot what you think.”

“Forsoth,” said Sheldon, “my Lord, I think they be even as they prove by their works.”

Then the Abbot, inclining himself over the table, said, “I trust and I pray God that I may dye one of the chylderne of Rome”, and so setting himself up again he said further, “I will prove that he is accursed that withstondyth a power....”

And so on, the Abbot quoting Latin, on which Sheldon remarked that he understood no Latin. The argument continued, but according to Harrison the Abbot was still obdurate, and then it was that the subject changed to the aforementioned mine of coals.

Again the differences between the Abbot and Sheldon would seem to have been healed, for in June, 1539, Sheldon is found acting as arbitrator between some of the tenants of the Abbey and the Abbot. In this year, significantly, the leases for eighty years each of the manors of Abberton and Broadway were granted by the Abbot and Convent of Pershore to Sheldon.

With these and other things in mind it is of particular interest to find that Sheldon, in his said will, recognizes “Oure souveraigne Lord Henry the eight by the Grace of God, Kinge of Englande, Fraunce and Irelande” as Defender of the Faith, “and in the Church of Inglonde and also of Irelande in erth the Supreme Head”. He bequeaths his “soull to Almightye God and our Lady Saint Mary”, and directs that “every

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priest that shall be at my dirige and masse to have xijd. And to every Clerk that can singe to have iiijd. And to other that cannot singe ijd.” Shortly afterwards, in connection with these matters testator refers to “our lady chapell at Beoley or Aburton”, which would seem to imply the existence, most improbable, of an earlier Lady Chapel in Beoley church than that to which later reference is made.

It may be noted that the old church* of S^t Eadburgha at Abberton has entirely disappeared, the present church having been built upon its site in 1881-2. In it are preserved the various Sheldon gravestones which are detailed by Nash† (1725-1811), the later Worcestershire historian.

* Of which there is a sketch, made in 1812, in the Prattinton Collections of Worcestershire History (*pene*s Society of Antiquaries).

† *Op. cit.* Vol. 1, p. 7.

Chapter II

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500—1570

THUS in 1546 another William Sheldon of Beoley, whose name with that of his son, another Ralph, is still so closely associated with the Sheldon tapestries, became the head of that powerful family, of which it seems that in these days there is not one single direct descendant, nor can even the actual site of the Sheldon mansion at Beoley be determined, from which they were ruling over their great estates at that time. It may have been, as suggested,* that the mansion stood on the present site of Beoley Hall, or a little to the west of it. It is more likely, however, that it was built on the rising ground nearer to the church of St Leonard, in which so many of the Sheldons lie.

In the following year Sheldon—of whom Habington wrote that he “in our age for wysdome, estate and authority in our county equalled most of the gentlemen of England”—held the onerous position of Receiver for the County of Warwick of the sums actually received in respect of the various monastic estates in the county, and from the accounts it seems that he and other members of his family were then already in possession of a number of grants of local manors and lands.

* V.C.H. *Worcs.* Vol. iv, p. 13.

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500–1570

He also appears, in 1551, as the tenant, at a yearly rent of eighteenpence, of a croft or close in Birmingham, “in Newe strete. . . Croft near ffecke lane [alias Peck lane]”, of which a part is now the very valuable site of New Street Railway Station, and eventually included that of King Edward’s School, lately demolished. This croft had been one of the possessions of “the late Guild of the Holy Cross in the town of Brymincham”—a Guild dating from 1382, at which time a Thomas Sheldon was one of the founders—and reference is again made to it in a petition made in 1638 by the Governors of the Free Grammar School of King Edward VI there, which King in 1551 had also granted the Guild’s possessions for the founding of the school. According to the petition the croft “formerly in the tenure of William Sheldon” was now in that of William Colmore the elder, “one of the first of the said Governors”.*

This William Colmore, or Collmer, a Birmingham mercer, died in 1566, and his will† evidences that Sheldon had also possessed other property in Birmingham, for the testator refers to his “lands in Birmingham bought of William Sheldon, of Bewleys, co. Worcester, esquire”, who had probably taken up his residence at Beoley after his father’s death in 1546.

It would seem that before that time Sheldon had been living in or quite near Birmingham, and apart

* Carter and Barnard, *Records of King Edward’s School, Birmingham*, Vol. III, pp. 2, 5 (Dugdale Soc.).

† P.C.C. 22 Crimes.

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500—1570

from those speculative considerations which evidently had a great attraction for him and other members of his family, he may have needed this croft, upon a part of which a barn was also later erected, in connection with the various sheep-dealing and wool-stapling activities in which several of his agents were then, and for many years afterwards, so actively engaged on his part and that of his son, Ralph, and for which the growing little town and its markets made a very useful centre.

It is pardonable that, wanting the above Colmore evidence, there has existed some confusion between our Sheldon and another contemporary William Sheldon, a Birmingham tanner,* to whom he was certainly related, and who also had an interest in some land adjacent to the abovementioned croft there. Our Sheldon still had his little memorial in Birmingham, at least until the close of the 17th century, for "Sheldon's croft" appears in the School Bailiff's Accounts, March, 1679—80.

Either in 1554 or 1555 Sheldon sent his young son and heir, Ralph, to travel on the Continent with one Richard Hyckes, of Barcheston—near Shipston-on-Stour, co. Worcester, and just across the Warwickshire border—as his guide, philosopher and friend. Whilst they were in Flanders, Hyckes learnt very much—indeed Anthony Wood goes so far as to say that he was

* Cf. Joseph Hill, "Birmingham Wills", *Transactions of the Midland Record Society*, Vol. I.

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500-1570

“bound prentice to a Dutch arras weaver”—concerning the art of tapestry-weaving,* in which William Sheldon was evidently greatly interested. Consequently he established Hyckes at Barcheston where—and later at Bordesley, near Beoley, too—many of the tapestries, which in recent years have become famous, were so successfully woven by Englishmen, some of them of local origin, possibly with some little Flemish assistance, of which at Beoley there is certainly no definite evidence.

Sheldon, as we know, always had many schemes on hand, and this tapestry-weaving was one of them. He makes very considerable reference to it in his will in January, 1569-70, wherein he refers to Hyckes as being “the only author and beginner of this Art within this Realm”, and later expresses his opinion that “his trade will be greatly beneficial to this commonwealth to trade youth in, and a means to store great sums of money within this Realm that will issue and go out of this Realm for the same commodities to the maintenance of the foreign parties and to the hindrance of this commonwealth”.

Happily there is now in the City Museum and Art Gallery in Birmingham a fine panel of this tapestry-work—Judah giving his staff and bracelets to Tamar—woven on the Sheldon looms about the year 1595, which panel came to Birmingham from Chastleton

* Barnard and Wace, “The Sheldon Tapestry Weavers and their Work”, *Archaeologia*, Vol. LXXVIII, illustrated; John Humphreys, *Elizabethan Sheldon Tapestries*, illustrated.

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500–1570

House,* co. Oxford, not far from Barcheston, some fifteen years ago. In the same collection is also the oak linenfold panelling (*c.* 1500) of a wainscoted room from the house at Barcheston, co. Warwick, in which Richard Hyckes was placed by William Sheldon, and lived there for many years between *c.* 1568 and his death, which took place there in 1621, he being aged about ninety-seven.

It is a curious fact, which must be placed on further record, that at a meeting of the Privy Council held at Farnham, in July, 1554, it was agreed that whereas William Sheldon, esquire, was to have been made a Knight of the Bath at the approaching marriage of Queen Mary with Philip of Spain, “he shall now in consideration of his small abilitie and lyving be spared and forborne from receiving that Ordre”.† There is no other relevant evidence, but this would certainly seem to be our William Sheldon. If so it can only be said that someone had misinformed the Council, for Sheldon must always have been a wealthy man.

Amongst other local matters Sheldon was concerned with Thomas Marowe, who had purchased the manor of Birmingham and also that of Berkswell, near Coventry. Marowe, making his will‡ in 1561 refers to

* The mansion of the Jones family. The Sheldon arms occur in the decoration of the house, and the inventory “of all and singular the Goods, Chattles & Debtes of Walter Jones”, taken in 1633, details the contents of Mr Sheldon’s chamber there, which included “three peeces of arras hangings” valued at £20.

† Acts of the Privy Council (N.S.), Vol. v, p. 50, f. 148.

‡ P.C.C. 37 Loftus.

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a sum of £25. 13s. 4d. owing to him by “my lord Clinton...which I paid M^r William Sheldon for him”. This Lord Clinton, who had a very distinguished naval career, possessed property in the Sheldon country, and in 1534 had married Elizabeth Blount, a mistress of Henry VIII, and connected with the Worcestershire Blounts.

Sheldon, after using Beoley for some twenty-five years as the centre of his manifold activities, now leaving Ralph, his heir, in possession of the old home, removed to Skilts, a few miles away and also just over the Warwickshire border. Of his estates in that county Nash says:

Enjoying a fair estate in Warwickshire, in right of his first wife, he added much thereto by purchase. In 24 Henry VIII* (1532) he bought the manor of Weston-juxta-Chiriton in that county, and 37 of that reign obtained licence from the king to impark 300 acres of land, meadow, pasture, and wood, to be called by the name of Weston park for ever. He had also a charter of free-warren to himself and his heirs; and built a very fair house there, which still remains, and since the destruction of the house at Beoley by fire, has been the principal residence of the family. He likewise purchased Skilts in Warwickshire, of which his posterity are possessed at this day.

Mr N. F. Woodward, in his *Story of Lower Skilts in Warwickshire*, published in pamphlet-form in 1934 and illustrated with his own equally accurate and very

* According to an indenture found some years ago amongst the Weston Park MSS., Sheldon bought this manor on 21 November, 1534, for £533. 6s. 8d.

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500–1570

interesting drawings of the house—now a farmhouse known as Lower Skilts—quotes Dugdale, the 17th century Warwickshire historian, who says that as a monastic grange the history of Skilts appears to have been uneventful until the time of the suppression of the Priory [Studley] in 1536, when the estate passed with the Priory itself to Sir Edmund Knightley, and then to James Duffyld, from whom it was purchased in the early years of Elizabeth's reign by William Sheldon, and was then described as consisting of two messuages, 600 acres of meadow, 600 acres of pasture, 120 acres of wood and 100 acres of heath and furze, all of which Sheldon emparked for deer, and it was he who there built "a very beautiful house of brick whereof his posterity are possessed to this day".

At Skilts, after living there for some years, Sheldon died on 23 December 1570, probably in the seventieth year of his age. A man great in his time and in his own country was to be gathered to his fathers, and it is not surprising to know that "Mr William Sheldon Esquier"—thus he is recorded in the parish registers—was buried at Beoley with great funeral pomp. The ceremony took place on 15 January, some three weeks after his death, and Robert Cooke, Clarenceux King-of-Arms, and other heralds, went down from London to be present at the ceremony, "as appears"—says Nash in 1781—"by a funeral certificate taken at his death, the original of which certified under the hands of Ralph Sheldon, and his brothers-in-law, Edmund Plowden, and Anthony Pollard, his executors, still

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500–1570

remains in the library of the College of Arms, with the banner-rolls and other achievements used on this occasion beautifully painted". This record still exists in the aforesaid library, but Nash's description is perhaps a little disappointing when one looks upon the certificate itself.

Sheldon had made his will* on 3 January, 1569–70, and added a codicil thereto on 28 September following. Probate was granted on 10 February, 1570–1. It is a very long will, as one might expect, and passing reference has already been made to it elsewhere as concerning his tapestry-weaving schemes and his weavers, which were evidently very present to his mind, for the Barcheston and Bordesley looms had then not long been in operation.

In the formal preamble to this will Sheldon appears briefly to disclose his Protestant sympathies; and bequeaths his body to be buried "in such holy place" as the executors and overseers shall think convenient.

Among the many other bequests may be noted those to his wife of the house and park of Skilts, with the game and coneys there, and all the jewels, plate, etc. which were there when they were married, together with £80 in gold, a horse, a mare, four geldings, and "the bed chests and cupboards in the bedroom at Beoley"; and of £4 each to "my five musicians". The will affords ample evidence of the great extent of Sheldon's possessions.

* P.C.C. 8 Holney.

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500-1570

It is an interesting fact that Habington (1560-1647) makes no reference to the Sheldon tapestry looms, although he must have heard of them, for they were at the height of their production in his early days. Owing to his mild associations with the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 it is familiar knowledge that the condition of his pardon was that he should never again stir out of Worcestershire, but even if Barcheston were just in Warwickshire, there was Bordesley close to Beoley, both of which safe places he visited, and particularly Beoley where, as an ardent Roman Catholic, he was delighted to note—in Edward Sheldon's time—that the family “run on a rase of true virtue hospitality and charity to the poore, whose exceeding troopes I saw theare releyved, beeing the invisible treasures of Heaven”.

Apparently Nash,* coming as late as 1781, is the first writer to make any reference to this subject, and he omits Bordesley. After a detailed account of Beoley and of Sheldon's marriages and his family, he says, partly in error: “This William Sheldon first introduced the working of tapestry into England, at Barcheston, having at his own expense brought workmen from Flanders, and employed them in weaving maps of the different counties of England, and other curious pieces, several of which are still in being at Weston.”

He also adds: “The whole parish of Beoley, except about 60 *l.* per ann. belongs to Mr [William] Sheldon,

* *Op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 66.

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500–1570

and contains near 4000 acres. The house . . . was burnt down in the civil war by the Cavaliers, lest the enemy should make a lodgement there.” The destruction must have been very complete, for even the site of the mansion is undetermined by those who have known Beoley for many years, and there do not appear to be any remains of it incorporated in other buildings in the near neighbourhood. It is said to have been approached by the incline which runs between the churchyard and the house in the present possession of Mrs Terry, and to have been at the summit of the little eminence immediately above the church.

Probably the mansion suffered its destruction in 1645, in which year there were other more or less local instances of similar happenings; and its unfortunate owner, Edward Sheldon, underwent still further tribulation for the Royal cause when, being named as one of the gentlemen of Worcestershire amongst the garrison of Worcester upon its surrender in July, 1646, he paid other penalties.

The map of Warwickshire* made, with other tapestry maps, for Weston, includes much of the northern and eastern boundaries of Worcestershire, and therein the Beoley mansion appears as a large turreted mansion in the midst of a double park. This representation cannot be taken very seriously, however, for a careful study of these maps makes it impossible to accept as authentic a number of the

* For illustrations of Sheldon tapestry maps, *v.* Tapestries Portfolio, Part III (Victoria and Albert Museum publications).

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500—1570

architectural groups which they contain—probably this was not very seriously intended—and there is no evidence that the Beoley mansion was at all on the grand scale. Presumably it did not compare with Weston—which also makes a fine appearance in the more intimate section of the Sheldon country in the Worcestershire map, it is somewhat modified in the Warwickshire map—which Ralph Sheldon built for himself in 1580, after which time it seems probable that Beoley was little used by the family, and indeed, as here appears, both William and Ralph Sheldon actually died at Skilts.

Weston-juxta-Cherington, in Warwickshire and some four miles from Shipston-on-Stour and Barcheston, had been granted to William Sheldon, then of Barcheston, and his heirs on 12 November, 1532; and later, in 1545, he was licensed to empark some 300 acres to be called Weston Park for ever. Weston was thus depopulated of its 7 messuages and one house, and only 80 acres remained of the village area, together with the manor-house. Sheldon and his heirs were also granted a charter of free warren here.

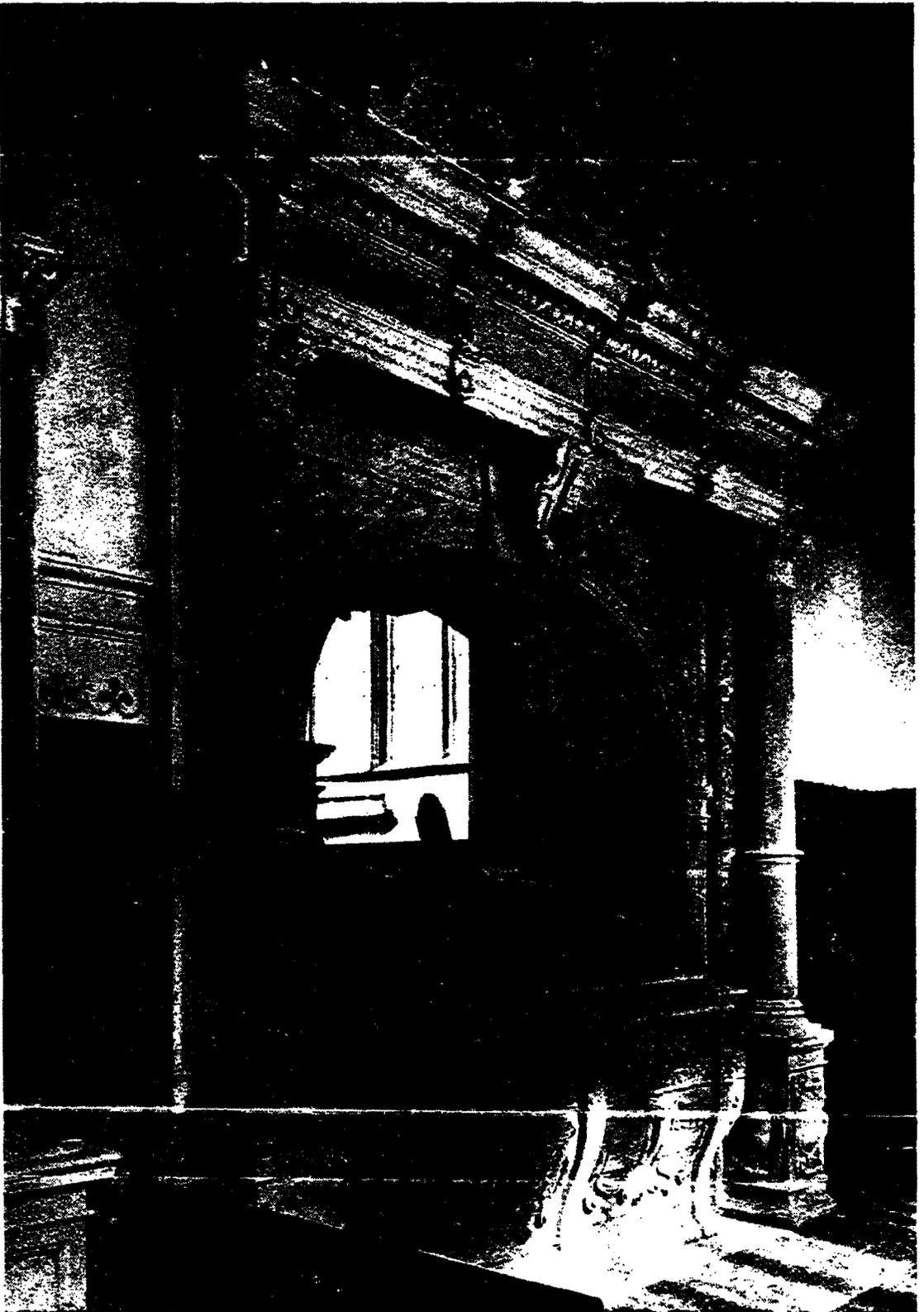
William Sheldon had sat in Parliament as one of the members for Worcestershire from 1547 to 1552, and at various succeeding intervals until 1567; he was also High Sheriff of Worcestershire in 1547, 1556, and 1566. During all this period of twenty years he was at the great height of his activities, and the more that his career becomes deducible from the many documentary evidences fortunately still extant, so much the

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more impressive become his remarkable activity of mind and energy of body. Of very dominating will, he seems to have delighted in litigation—rather a Sheldon failing at other times, too—but, where he possessed so much, to have condescended at times to great pettiness in some of his legal actions, actions which must have placed him in an undignified position—despite the monumental testimony of his son, Ralph, which follows later, and the second-hand testimony of Dr Eedes (*v.* p. 81)—in the eyes of his many influential friends both in London and in his own Sheldon country.* But withal he was a great man, and did great things.

The actual year in which Sheldon married his first wife has not transpired. She was Mary, co-heiress of William Willington, of Barcheston, Warwickshire, a small parish adjacent to Shipston-on-Stour, from which little town the river separates it. Nash says that with this marriage Barcheston—destined indeed to play no small part in Sheldon's eventful life—came into the family, together with the more or less neighbouring manors of Ditchford and Fulready. This statement, however, has been proved incorrect, for Willington, who possessed an immense amount of real estate, held Barcheston until his death in 1554, when by his will he left it to his cousin, William Barnes, of Tadlington, in Tredington, and ultimately it and the other two manors became Sheldon's property, probably by pur-

* *v.* map, Barnard and Wace, *op. cit.*



TOMB OF WILLIAM (d. 1570) AND MARY SHELDON
IN BEOLEY CHURCH (Photographed from the chancel)

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500–1570

chase and not before 1561, when Barnes died.* He had purchased the manor of Tadlington, or Talton, formerly a possession of the Abbot and Convent of Evesham, from William Sheldon and his brother, Francis, in 1544,† at which time William Sheldon is described as being of Weston, and Barnes as of Oxhill.

Willington's estate, later on, after the death of his "very aged widow", the date of which has not transpired, unfortunately became the subject of a chancery suit‡ at the instance of his stepson, Robert Middlemore, who filed a bill against Sheldon and his co-executors for the payment of legacies. Probably an affray which took place at Barcheston in July of the following year was one of the first signs of the discord which was eventually to arise so seriously amongst these much-intermarried families, and which resulted in several other lawsuits. The widow Willington, Sheldon's mother-in-law, was at that time living in the Barcheston district—probably at the hamlet Willington—and it was alleged that her servants, bringing to her house from Ditchford a cart laden with wool belonging to Barnes, were attacked at Barcheston ford, and that Sheldon was "at hand" in this affair, in which his servants and

* Rees Price, "William Willington of Barcheston: A 16th Century Warwickshire Woolstapler", *Evesham Journal*, 12 January–9 February, 1924. His effigy, together with his wife's, lies upon their beautiful monument in Barcheston church. It is illustrated in *Some Account of the Family of Middlemore of Warwickshire and Worcestershire* (Phillimore and Carter), facing p. 36.

† Cf. conveyance at Worcester Public Library.

‡ Barnard, *A 16th Century Affray at Barcheston*.

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500–1570

friends were said to have taken a forcible part, but presumably he did not reveal himself.

After Anne Willington's death Robert Middlemore was again complainant in another lawsuit,* undated but inferentially of the year 1560, in which it is alleged that after her husband's death William Sheldon and the other executors repaired to Barcheston, where they stayed with their retinues until the month's mind of the deceased was over, on which occasion two stall-fed oxen were had over from Studley and consumed by the party. These oxen belonged to the deceased's estate, as did the grass consumed by the horses during the month in the meadows and pastures, valued at 20 marks; and also 30 quarters of malt at 16*d.* per quarter; 15 quarters of wheat at 18*s.* 8*d.* per quarter; 9 "cowpull of haberdynes"—salted cod—at 20*d.* per couple; half a hundred of lyngs† at 2*s.* 8*d.* per couple; 40 fat wethers and culling ewes to the value of £7; 20 lambs at 20*d.* each; a butt of sack, £5; 2 hogsheads of claret wine, £4; and half a butt of malvesie. It is also alleged that the executors took charge of a spice-box containing £300 which Anne Willington had been wont to keep under her bed at Barcheston.

There were six children born to William and Mary Sheldon, the two sons being Ralph, his heir, and William, who was twenty-seven when his father died in 1570. The four daughters all married. Mary Sheldon‡

* Chan. Pro., Ser. 2, 122/71.

† Sea-fish.

‡ Her will is not traceable.

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died in 1553, being buried at Beoley; and later on Sheldon married again, his second wife being another heiress, Margaret, daughter of Sir Richard Brooke, Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer, and widow of Sir William Whorwood, Attorney-General to King Henry VIII. By her first husband she had two children, Thomas and Margaret Whorwood. There were no children by the marriage with William Sheldon, who by his will made considerable bequests to her. She died in 1589, aged eighty, and was buried in the church of S^t Thomas the Apostle, London, afterwards destroyed in the Great Fire.

Her will* made in 1587 contains bequests of a chain of gold to “my well-beloved son-in-law Thomas Throckmorton”—Sir Thomas Throckmorton of Coughton Court, Warwickshire, a few miles from Beoley—of a cross of gold to “my daughter [Margaret] his wife”; and “of my cheyne of gould which my daughter used to wear”, to John Throckmorton, her grandson. Other of her bequests were of standing cups, including one to her stepson, Ralph Sheldon; of featherbeds; and of forty shillings for “the amendment of the highway and lane joining Skilts Parke”, not far from Coughton Court. There were also remissions of debts owed to her by relatives, including the large sum of £1740 owed to her by the aforementioned Sir Thomas Throckmorton, brother of Anne Throckmorton, who had married William Sheldon’s son and heir, Ralph.

The tomb of William Sheldon in the chapel in

* P.C.C. 17 Drury.

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500–1570

Beoley church is briefly described elsewhere (pp. 79–82). The Latin inscription on the mural tablet close to it on the east wall of the chapel may be translated as follows:

To William Sheldon, son of Ralph Sheldon and Philippa Heath;

He inherited a great fortune from his parents and not by the opportunities of any public office, or by fawning on a prince, but by his well-known and honourable prudence he greatly increased it:

A man born to aid the public good, so patriotic that he was the first in England to commence the Art of Tapestry-Weaving, for which at his own expense he provided large sums of money, and left by will property and money to care for the workmen in that craft:

Towards his neighbours, by his very influence he settled their quarrels as they arose, and between discordant people by his very love he established peace; many of his servants, as also not a few of his friends, he raised to ample fortunes.

In his will he greatly and open-heartedly benefited his relations as well as others:

To his children (of whom Mary the daughter of William Willington of Barcheston bore to him six in number, and dying on 25th January, 1553, commended them to his care) he presented his sons, Ralph and William, with ample patrimonies, and to his daughters goodly dowries:

Ann married to Francis Savage of Elmley [Castle] in the county of Worcester, Philippa to Anthony Pollard of Newnham in the county of Oxford, Catherine to Edmund Plowden of Plowden in Shropshire, Goodith to Robert Brayn of Bristol, and he [William Sheldon] left them all in peace and concord:

To his fellow creatures his own house, with all his goods, was an hospitable inn, ever at their service.

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1500—1570

On December 24th, 1570, he departed this life. As an example of true virtue he was greatly missed, no less by his friends in the county than by his children, his relatives and his servants.

Ralph, his son and heir, erected this monument.

Chapter III

RALPH SHELDON, 1537-1613

RALPH, the elder son of William Sheldon, was born in 1537, and on 16 May, 1557, married Anne, fourth daughter of his near neighbour, Sir Robert Throckmorton, of Coughton Court. This was shortly after his return from those "tapestry" travels abroad, with Richard Hyckes as his mentor, undertaken when he had completed his Oxford career,* after which, according to the monumental inscription at Beoley, he went back to the Court of Queen Mary, but in what capacity does not transpire.

There is still a memorial of this marriage in the two remaining pieces† of a tapestry map which showed the county of Gloucester and parts of the neighbouring counties of Somerset, Wiltshire, and Monmouth. This map was without doubt woven on the Sheldon looms at Barcheston and, again according to Wood, it hung with other tapestry maps from the same looms in the dining-room at Weston. It would have been woven, therefore, about 1588, and incidentally to commemorate that marriage, some thirty years previously, of Ralph Sheldon and Anne Throckmorton, which was destined to be so fruitful. On the largest piece of the

* His name is not to be found in the University records.

† Victoria and Albert Museum Portfolios, Tapestries, Part III, No. 5.

RALPH SHELDON, 1537-1613

map there is a coat-of-arms in which, amongst others, are the arms of Sheldon (*sable a fesse between three sheldrakes argent*), and of Throckmorton (*gules on a chevron argent three bars gemel sable*), together with two instances of the Sheldon motto *Optimum Pati*.

These two pieces* have in recent years been in the possession of the Earl of Dudley, but were sold at Christie's to Mr Francis Mallett on 18 June, 1936, "at the high figure of £1008",† this being the most recent instance of the sale of Sheldon tapestry work. One of these pieces had been sold for £12 in 1842, and the other offered for £5 in 1875.

There were ten children of this marriage, being one son, Edward, baptized at Beoley, on 22 May, 1561, and nine daughters, of whom at least six were also baptized there. Anne Sheldon predeceased her husband, and he afterwards married Anne, Lady Taseborough, a widow, who survived him. He had succeeded to a large share of the great estates left by his father, and to these he added by purchase the manor of Steeple Barton, co. Oxford, and the manor of Broadway, but the latter was sold to his second cousin, William Sheldon of Broadway, in his lifetime.

The fortunes of the family had now reached their summit. Great state was kept at Weston, and the hospitality of the Sheldons was everywhere renowned: "I am so kindly used in this Country", writes a certain

* The larger piece, 6 ft. 5 in. high, 7 ft. 2 in. wide; the smaller piece, 6 ft. high, 3 ft. 11 in. wide.

† *The Times*, 19 June, 1936.

RALPH SHELDON, 1537-1613

Charles Morrice,* from Weston, in June, 1596, "coming thether as a Stranger, as I know not any waies how to deserve it...."

Ralph Sheldon had married into a family always deeply attached to the Old Faith, and there is no doubt that whatever his views may have been in his earlier years, or however much he may then have been influenced by his father, he himself became gradually devoted to it as time went on. Thus it was that despite his evidently gentle and unassuming nature and the good that he did everywhere around him, he became increasingly involved in the rising tide of religious persecution during the Elizabethan period and beyond, and doubtless his riches must have been an added attraction to those who sought to bring about his downfall, and who knew that he was connected with local families who were then under grave suspicion.

There was more than one mysterious Sheldon thus placed, and on 16 February, 1570, Sir Thomas Gargrave writes to Sir William Cecil, who in that year had organized a secret service to detect plots against Queen Elizabeth, that he hears from Edinburgh that "Sheldon, Somerville, and other agents of the Queen of Scots run between her and Scotland and do great hurt, and that these two are now here, and shortly to return. I have sent to Rotherham, Doncaster, Ferrybridge, and other places to lay wait for and take them." †

* Harl. 4713, f. 48.

† Calendar S.P. Dom., Addenda, Elizabeth, Vol. xvii, p. 95.

RALPH SHELDON, 1537-1613

It is scarcely necessary to note that the laws against recusants were now becoming increasingly severe, as is evidenced by the Statute of 1580, followed later by those of 1592-3, and 1605-6. Thus it was by law accumulatively enacted that a recusant should not go more than five miles from his dwelling-place; two-thirds of his property were under forfeiture to the Crown; he could not legally bequeath his lands; and he was at the mercy of his neighbours, who were able to extort money from him by threats of further persecution. These laws were not only in themselves severe, but they were also constantly strained and abused through private malice.

The early troubles of Ralph Sheldon for religion's sake are made more fully apparent in the records of the Privy Council,* and firstly at a meeting of the Council held at Oatlands on 21 August, 1580, when "Ralfe Sheldon of Beoley in the countie of Worcester, esquire, being by order from the Lords of her Majesties Previe Counsell bound by Mr Walter Blunt, Henrie Barckley† and others to make his apparunce before their Lordships on the xxijth of this presente, hathe neverthelesse for the savegard of his bond entered his apparunce the daie abovesaid, and was further bound a new to appere before the Lord Busshop of London‡ the xxijth of the said August to answeere soche matters as at his coming should be objected against him".

* Vols. xi, xii, and xxxii.

† Both of Worcestershire.

‡ John Aylmer (Bishop of London, 1577-94), who became very unpopular owing to his arbitrary and unconciliatory disposition.

RALPH SHELDON, 1537-1613

That the interview between the Bishop and Sheldon had failed in its desired effect, Sheldon remaining obdurate and being cast into prison, was evidenced at a meeting of the Council on 1 November next, when the following order was made:

A lettre to the Bishop of London that where there remayneth in the prison of the Mareschalsea* Ralf Sheldon, esquire, committed by his Lordship for his obstinacie in Relligion according to their lordships' order heretofore in that behaulf geven unto him, it is signified unto his Lordship that humble petition is made to their Lordships by his wiefe that in respecte of a disease wherewith he is afflicted to the perill of his lief, he may be removed to some place of more convenience for the repeire of chirugions unto him for his better cure; for that respecte their Lordships have been contented to yielde thereunto, and do hereby pray his Lordship to geve order fourthwith for the removing of him to the house of M^r Deane of Westminster, there to remeyne as prisoner under his charge untill he shall be recovered of his sickness, or that their Lordships shall geve furdre order for the returne of him to prison, or his libertie in case he shall conforme himself unto her Majesties lawes; and therefore he is required to shew these their Lordships' letters unto the Deane for the receiving of him into his custody, and suffering of his wiefe & such other personnes as he shall necessarily use for the time of his disease, allowing unto him the benefitte of such gardens and walkes as do appertaine unto the Deane's house, and yf the said Deane shall finde him in case to receive conference for the reforming of his errour in Relligion, then to conferre with him as he shall see cause, and to certifie unto their Lordships the effects of his travell,

* In Southwark, and at that time one of the most important prisons in the country.

RALPH SHELDON, 1537-1613

and this shal be both unto him and the Deane a sufficient warrant for the removing and receiving of the said Ralf Sheldon, as is aforesaid.

So it happened that Sheldon left the miserable precincts of the Marshalsea, and crossed the river to Westminster and to its Deanery, where he was doubtless put into comfortable quarters and had those benefits of such gardens and walks, of which he was evidently so fond at his own home, that the Deanery might possess.

At any rate the desired conference took place and seems to have proved successful, for his guardian-host, with whom Sheldon still remained, was ultimately able to report to the Council, then sitting at Westminster, that Sheldon had now agreed to conform, thus: "The same daye Mr Raphe Sheldon, esquire, heretofore committed unto the Marshallsey for not cominge to the churche & conforminge him self in matters of Religion, and afterwards to the Deane of Westminster to be conferred with, beinge called in before their Lordships promised to yelde himself duetifull and obedient unto her Majestie, and in token thereof to be contented to repaire unto the churche, and in all other things to serve and obey her Highness as becomethe a dutifull subjecte."

Reference to this conference is evidently being made in the Calendar of State Papers Domestic (Elizabeth—Charles I) where, under 31 December, 1580, there is allusion to a "discourse to Mr [Ralph] Sheldon to persuade him to conform with arguments to prove it

RALPH SHELDON, 1537-1613

lawful for a Roman Catholic to attend the Protestant Service". Failure to conform and to attend the parish church on Sundays carried with it a fine of 20 marks a month.

In the same Calendar there are many references to various members of the Sheldon family, one of them being under 31 December, 1583, when in the examination of one Hugh Hall, priest, he replied that "he has said Mass at M^r Ralph Sheldon's, and has resided fourteen years with M^r John Talbot, Sir John Throckmorton, Lord Windsor, and M^r Sheldon", all of them being more or less neighbours.

However, despite the Westminster conference, suspicions seem again to have been aroused in the minds of the authorities a few years later, for at a meeting of the Council held at Greenwich on 23 June, 1587, it was reported that: "Ralfe Sheldon of Bewlie in the countie of Worcester, esquiour, being by their Lordships' direction bound to make his personall appearance before them, this daie resorted to the Clarke of the Counsell desiring to have his appearance recorded. Whereupon he was enjoined to give his attendance, and not to departe till by their order he shall be dismissed."

Whatever it may have been, the matter was presumably adjusted, but Sheldon and other members of the family—particularly the womenfolk—continue to be named as recusants in these State Papers;* and in 1594 there is reference to an alleged premeditated

* Such references are also to be found in the Calendar of Worcestershire Quarter Sessions Papers, Willis Bund.

RALPH SHELDON, 1537-1613

rebellion in North Wales, "the chiefest aid for which is to come from Ralph Sheldon", and that he had sent an emissary to Louvain "on pretence of fetching hawks...but really with letters to Cardinal Allen",* who died in that year. Sheldon's house at Beoley was duly searched under the orders of Sir Thomas Lucy, High Sheriff of Worcestershire, but nothing of an incriminating nature being found there he was again sent up to London for examination.

Notwithstanding all these experiences, and leading his life under continual suspicion, it is interesting and piquant to find that, on 7 October, 1601, the Privy Council found it politically expedient to ask Sheldon particularly not to allow any animosity of religion to prevail with him and his Worcestershire friends at the parliamentary election which was to take place a week later.

The local candidates were Sir Thomas Leighton, of Feckenham, a few miles from Beoley, and Thomas Russell, of Strensham, both Worcestershire men. The Privy Council appear to have anticipated particular opposition to Leighton, an ardent Protestant and a distinguished soldier, who held high military office in the latter part of Queen Elizabeth's reign, and had been one of the general officers summoned to consult together in March, 1588, to repel the Spanish Armada. So we read:

A letter to M^r Ralfe Sheldon esquire. Whereas wee understande that some difference is like to growe amongst you of

* Salisbury MSS. Vol. iv, pp. 618-19.

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that shire about the election of the Knights for the Parlyament, and that the name of Sir Thomas Leighton being in questyon for one of the said places yt is doubted there wilbe some opposicion made out of facion to crosse him therein. As wee shall not neede to say anything in the favor of the gentleman because his quality and meritt sondry wayes by speciall services towards her Majesty & the State & the good accompt which deservedly her Majestie holdeth of him do sufficiently recommend him, so it is not our meaning in any sorte to restrayne or hinder the liberty of a free election which ought to be amongst you, but because it is suspected that some undue proceeding may be used against him, especially out of anymosity of religion, which would greatly displease her Majestie if she should be acquainted therewith, wee thought good to admonishe you which are of judgement to have regarde not to do yourselfe the wrong to be transported with any suche passion, for that as any favour which should be conferred on the gentleman whom she doth so well esteeme would be very agreeble unto her Majesty, so she would be very sensible of any evill measure which by undue practises should be offered him. Whereof not doubting but you will have that conciderecion which appertayneth, wee bid you, etc.

Presumably, however, all went well, and Leighton and Russell were duly returned to represent the county.

A similar letter was sent to John Talbot, of Grafton, near Bromsgrove, and not many miles from Beoley. He also was a Roman Catholic, and had represented Worcestershire in Parliament from 1572 to 1584.

Ralph Sheldon had also represented the county from 1562 to 1567, and had been its High Sheriff in 1576. In August, 1594, he was again under suspicion of

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being concerned in plots to kill the Queen, and to offer the Crown to the Earl of Derby, with the aid of the King of Spain. At this time Sir Thomas Lucy—of Charlecote, co. Warwick—and Sir John Harrington were ordered to search Weston. In the course of a series of depositions one examinant says that he heard Cardinal Allen say that “Mr Sheldon was as good a Catholic as any in England”.* A few years afterwards, in 1600, there does not appear to have been any attempt to implicate him in the Essex Rebellion.

Later on, apparently in August, 1603, some correspondence between Sheldon and his relative, Francis Plowden, of Plowden, co. Salop, was intercepted by the neighbouring Bailiff of Ludlow, and there is reference to a letter written from Skilts in which, darkly it may have been thought, Sheldon says that the Spanish Ambassador is either at Gravelines or in England. Then some two years afterwards, in 1605, there came the Gunpowder Plot, in which many of Sheldon’s influential friends and neighbours were gravely implicated, and in which the familiar Coughton Court—his wife’s home—played its part, but again he appears to have been without offence, albeit he must have heard so much about it all, at least after the event.

In that same year Sheldon, who had also involved himself in the apparently reckless purchase of Steeple Barton, acknowledged the immense debt of £24,000 which he then owed to one Thomas Hoerd, of London,

* Cal. S.P. Dom. 1591-4, pp. 541-7, etc.

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esquire, concerning which an arrangement was made, of which a counterpart of the original articles of agreement,* executed by Hoerd, is in Birmingham Reference Library. Otherwise there is no present evidence relative to this remarkable transaction. There is further reference to these matters in the Calendar of State Papers Domestic, A.D. 1547-1625, from which it transpires that Hoerd was also a recusant.

There are in the Aston Papers† four holograph letters from Ralph Sheldon to Margaret Knollys, a relative. They are all written from Weston between 1587 and 1590, one being dated 22 January, 1588-9, in which year—according to his rather troublesome friend, Anthony Wood, the Oxford antiquary and historian—Sheldon began to build his great house there, possibly on the site of a smaller house with which the family had been associated for some fifty years. Each letter, so badly written, reveals his sympathetic spirit. They chiefly concern an annuity payable to a certain relative, Thomas Bracebridge, concerning whom Sheldon is cautious, “. . . untill I am fully satysfyed you are not Ignorant good cosyn of the Imperfectyons of the man and my Travell so my Trouble is to Releve those his poor children being of my bludde of whom god knoweth he maketh Lyttell care”.

In the third letter, written on 22 January, 1588-9, he turns to another and more congenial subject: “The blacke Myllstones you wryte of I provyded for a very

* No. 167897.

† Add. MSS. 36901. Vol. 1, ff. 6, 13, 28, and 33.

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Lytle Mill I made at Beoley, only for the provision of my house, the w'ch I do alwaies use when I kepe my howsholde there, in myne absense comon stones of o'r contrey are in place of them used because for suche p'sons the fynesse of the bredd is not Respected.

“I do also suppose that they are farr to Little for yo'r use unlesse yo'r mill be made of that ffashion, butt if I may do you pleasure in provydinge of the Lyke Kynde of Stones for you I will do the best I maye so as you do send me the measure and Syse you desire to haue them of. . . .”

On 20 November, 1612, Ralph Sheldon made his will,* also at Skilts, and died there on 30 March, 1613, aged seventy-six, a relatively poor man, leaving some one hundred and thirty descendants. In the preamble to the will he does humbly “proteste to live and by Godes grace and assistance doe hope to die in the unities of the Catholicke Church”, and desires to be buried “in the Northe Ile of the Church of Beoley aforesaid lately erected and builded by me And in the Tombe laste erected wherein my wife [Anne Throckmorton] lyethe”.

Seven of Sheldon's daughters, who had all married into county families, were then living, and to each of them he left a basin and ewer of silver of the value of £25, to be engraved with “the Armes of every of the husbandes of my said daughters joynd with mine”. The other two daughters had married and died, so Sheldon makes to one of the husbands—“my well

* P.C.C. 28 Capell.

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beloved son-in-law"—a similar bequest, but with "His armes and myne to be engraved thereon. . . . Also I doe release and forgive all somes of money as he doth owe unto me". The other son-in-law is to have £10, "to be bestowed in some piece of plate at his pleasure to remayne as a Remembrance of me".

Of the seven very influential marriages one only need be noted, being that of the eldest daughter, Elizabeth, who married John Russell, of Strensham, co. Worcester, at Beoley Church on 13 March, 1574. Some ten years later a considerable quarrel arose between Ralph Sheldon—who it is evidenced was then living at Beoley—and this son-in-law, who—if the suggestions made in the Star Chamber Proceedings* are to be taken at all seriously—must have been a very difficult man with whom to deal. The quarrel appears to have arisen on account of some delay in the settlement of Russell's wife's marriage portion, but despite all the allegations the matter must at last have been amicably settled, as would seem to be evidenced by Ralph Sheldon's will—the piece of silver on which was to be engraved the arms of Russell impaling Sheldon—and the testator's especial bequest to Elizabeth Russell of "my little watche made by Samuell". It may be added that he also bequeathed to his son and heir, Edward, "my strickinge clock which I do usually carry with me".

Amongst many other bequests testator gives to Robert Jones, his servant, all his wearing apparel,

* 27 Elizabeth, S. 15/38.

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excepting those whereof the outside is either velvet, satin, or silk; and also excepting the "finest black cloath" and the gold buttons, which are to go to William, his grandchild, son of Edward, the heir and only son. Jones is also to have testator's "graye ambling mare", or £6. 13s. 4d. in money at his choice.

In the south corner of the Sheldon chapel, close to the uninscribed tomb of Ralph and Anne Sheldon, is a stone with a long and rather involved Latin inscription to his memory, which is given by Habington and by Nash. The following is a translation of it:

Sacred to the memory of Ralph Sheldon, esquire, a man of great wisdom, modesty and kindness, remarkable for his gifts of knowledge and judgment, a rare mixture, a generous and beloved citizen:

After he had spent his youth in studying at Oxford, he visited France and other countries and lived at court:

He then married the daughter of Robert Throckmorton, knight, by whom he begot one son and nine daughters, and from them were begot, more or less, 130 descendants.

He dedicated this chapel to God, the chief of his wishes, and built at Weston, with great magnificence, a house for himself as master and for his descendants, calmly falling asleep.

Edward Sheldon, instituted his sole heir, mindful of a dear parent, and orphaned now by the death of so great a man, to show his esteem and love, sorrowfully raised this inscription such as it is. He died A.D. 1613.

Here is interred Ralph Sheldon. He lived supremely blessed, remote from ambition, and shunning honours, lord of himself and great in his own person, likewise a learned friend of learned men, and to his friends as patron and companion, pleasant, wise, restrained, steady, good, loyal:

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Kind without disguise, faithful, steadfast, true, he gave much help to many, and every help to all:

He injured none, and showed no first consideration for himself alone:

Not forgetful of life's end, this chapel for the burial of himself and of his kindred he had designed while alive, mindful of fleeting time and speeding death.

Habington, too, has written his tribute to Ralph Sheldon, whom he probably knew well. He says of him that "though confyninge hym sealfe in a private lyfe yet (yf my dazeled eyes might discover hys worthynes) he desearved for his singular partes of mynd whiche flowed from hys tounge and penne a preeminent dignity, hee was the father of M^r Edward Sheldon, [1558-1643] and grand^dfather of M^r William Sheldon, [1588-1659] bothe now lyvinge and inheriting hys large revenewes and other indowments".

Chapter IV

EDWARD SHELDON, 1558-1643

EDWARD SHELDON, the only son of Ralph Sheldon, married, before 1588, Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Markham, of Cottam and Ollerton, co. Nottingham, who at one time in his career was Standard Bearer to the Band of Gentlemen Pensioners. There were three sons and three daughters of this marriage.

This Sheldon succeeded to most of the family estates, but does not appear to have been much associated with them for many years, some of which he certainly spent abroad with an imposing retinue, as is evidenced in the Calendar of State Papers Domestic, under date 23 June, 1625, where there is this note: "Mr Sheldon's humble suit to your Lordship that you would procure a license for him and his wife Elizabeth together with Ralph Sheldon* and Bridget his wife and their eighteen servants and six horses to travel [on the Continent] for two or three years." The license was granted, and was renewed three years later for the same period. Similar licenses had been granted to him and to other Sheldons at earlier dates in this period.

In connection with this license it is of interest to record that during the course of these researches further

* His second son, of Steeple Barton, who had married Bridget, daughter of Anthony Morgan.

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information has been supplied, thanks to M^r Arthur Stockton, of Banbury—on the western border of the Sheldon country—by the actual and carefully folded Letters of Safe-Conduct, dated 30 April, 1625, and signed by Charles I, at that time granted to Edward Sheldon, which document (Pl. III) is now in M^r Stockton's possession.

This document may be unique in its class and for its period, at least no other similar instance appears to be known. It is, of course, in French, and quite formal in its style, but it reveals the fact that Sheldon, acting under the advice of his doctors and for the recovery of his health, has made his very humble request to the King that he, with his suite and company, may have permission to cross the sea without let or hindrance, and so to journey on to the spa-water resorts in Germany, which in their curative attractions were at this time beginning seriously to compete with Spa in Belgium.

The King had only been on the throne some five weeks when he signed this passport, so it is impressed with the Privy Seal of James I, who had died on the preceding 27 March. It would seem possible, however, that Sheldon did not at once begin his journey, for as abovesaid he was again applying for a passport only seven weeks later.

The note of 23 June, 1625, is written on the back of a letter from Lord Conway of Ragley—a few miles from Beoley—one of the principal Secretaries of State to Charles I, to the Lord Treasurer, Sir James Ley. In

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the same year (1625) it is reported that “Mr Sheldon a great recusant now at Dunkirk keeps up communication with the coast of Essex”, but this is not in the least likely to have been Edward Sheldon.

Eleven years afterwards, in August, 1636, Charles I visited Warwick, and a day or two later went on “to Weston at Mr Sheldon’s house with great delight”, so it is recorded.

Edward Sheldon made his will* on 20 September, 1643, a date sadly notable in the events of the Great Civil War, for thereon was fought the first and indecisive Battle of Newbury, in which that rare spirit, Lucis Cary, second Viscount Falkland, was killed. Sheldon died, suddenly it would seem, a few days later, but probate—then generally in a very involved state—was not granted until 10 May, 1650. In this will he describes himself as being in good health and perfect memory, and commends his soul in the usual way, adding that he professes to live and, by God’s grace, hopes to die “in the unity of the Catholique Church and by the benefitts thereof to be a member of his Triumphant Church for ever:

“And I will that my body shall be buried in the North Isle of the Church of Beoley aforesaid (erected and builded by my deare father Ralph Sheldon deceased) with such funeralls and expenses thereupon, and unto the poor as my executors hereafter named shall seem convenient, avoiding all vain superfluity therein.”

* P.C.C. 54 Pembroke.

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Testator then refers to his "last goeing over beyond the Seas" and proceeds to make bequests which show that he was a man of considerable estate.

His memorial is on the south wall of the church. It consists of a double tablet surmounted by a shield bearing the arms of Sheldon impaling Markham. The Latin inscriptions in the two panels are long, and not being noted by Habington were doubtless not yet in evidence when he visited Beoley. The first panel does not contain anything of additional interest to the inscription in the second panel which, after important genealogical details, translated continues thus:

. . . This man, Edward Sheldon, though greater in paternal virtues than in fortune, when by his prudence he could hand on his inheritance enriched to his son and heir, and could provide abundantly for his other children, crossed over to Belgium, in the year 1625, that he might have leisure more freely for God and for himself. He settled at Namur and remained there with his devoted wife until 1630, when Heaven snatched away that most dear consort. Thence, persuaded by his friends, although he himself was unwilling, he returned to his native land and at length, full of days and good work, he died on Sept. 26, 1643, in the 83rd [*sic*] year of his age.

His grateful heir has now set up this monument to a parent—indeed well-deserving—not in conformance with a common custom, but as a witness of filial love, for a document of honour, for a religious obsequy, from a most devoted soul and one most heavily affected.

Edward Sheldon's youngest son, Edward (1599-1687), who was born at Beoley, went up to Oxford and became a gentleman commoner of Gloucester Hall,

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eventually merged into Worcester College. After leaving Oxford he travelled, always a Sheldon passion, on the Continent for some considerable time, and then went to live at Stratton, near Cirencester, co. Gloucester. He had inherited this estate from his father, but eventually lost much of it on account of his loyalty to the Old Faith, and to the cause of Charles I.

This Edward Sheldon, who made some reputation as a translator of French works, married Mary, daughter of Lionel Wake, of Antwerp, and of Pedington, co. Northampton, and had ten children. Of these Lionel became a Benedictine monk and chaplain to Anne, Duchess of York; Dominick was a Colonel of Horse under James II in Ireland; and another son, Ralph, was a royal equerry.

Chapter V

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1588-9-1659

WILLIAM SHELDON, the eldest son and heir of Edward Sheldon (d. 1643), was born at Weston on 9 March, 1588-9, and in 1611 married Elizabeth, daughter of the second Lord Petre, she then presumably being only fifteen years old. There were three sons and two daughters of this marriage, the eldest son—later to be well known as “The Great Sheldon”, the antiquary—being baptized Ralph, at Beoley, on 10 August, 1623.

On 26 September, 1638, this William Sheldon, together with William Sandys and other local notabilities, was presented with the freedom of Evesham, under circumstances which seem to suggest some active association with Sandys’s scheme for the navigation of the Avon, for which he had recently obtained a grant from Charles I.

At various times during the early years of the Great Civil War Sheldon was, in his turn, harassed as “a Popish delinquent”, it being suggested that he had concealed moneys arising from his Beoley and Weston properties; that he had undervalued certain of his Worcestershire properties; that he had concealed “two or three trunks full of money and treasure worth from £7000 to £8000”; and that he had been associated

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1588-9-1659

with the royalist forces at Worcester in 1645 and 1646.* In the latter year, then described as being of Beoley, he compounded with the Commissioners to live at home, and endured further tribulations. However, on 6 January, he was discharged from further obligations and restored to his estates.

The late J. M. Woodward, so long and honourably associated with Beoley, was familiar with "The Book of Beoley Manor"—an old estate record in manuscript which has very unfortunately disappeared since his day though he consulted it in 1885—compiled an article† concerning it from which the following extract is taken:

Copy of a Paper,‡ left by William Sheldon, Esq., who lived in Oliver's time:

That before the war, £1050 was taken from me out of my lodging in London, whereof £600 I borrowed at interest for 10 ct. I had promiss of the publick faith, but never recd. any recompense for ye same.

That in September 1643, my house at Weston, in Warwickshire, was ransacked, and my cattle and goods taken away by souldiers, to a great vallow.

That in December following, my house at Beoley, in Worcestershire, was burnt to the ground, and all my goods and cattle there plundered by the souldiers to a very great

* Calendars of the Proceedings of the Commissioners for the Advancement of Money, 1642-6; and of State Papers Domestic.

† *Redditch Indicator*, c. April, 1885; also N. F. Woodward, *op. cit.* pp. 13-14.

‡ Doubtless addressed to the Commonwealth authorities in c. 1653.

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vallow, besides the incurable loss of my chiefest evidence and court rolls consumed in the fire.*

That immediately after, all my flock of cattle for my provision of housekeeping was taken from us at Weston by A party of souldiers by means whereof I and my wife were inforst for our refuge and safety to goe to the city of Worcester, and after a short stay there, finding the inconvenience of living in A garrison, removed to a small ffarme house in the parish of Clifton upon Teme, in the Co. of Worcester, where wee remained about 8 months, until all our goods and horses were also taken Away by A party of souldiers and the house threatened to be burnt, whereupon my wife and myselfe not knowing whither to goe by reason of Sir W. Waller's souldiers had then lately before taken away all our provision and stock of cattle at Weston, compounded for with the committee of Warwick Shire, were fors'd to returne back to Worcester. And after A short stay there and long before the sd. city was besieged, wee returned to Weston there remaining ever since with the Allowance and approbation of the city of Coventry.

W. SHELDON.

Sheldon was a man of some literary taste, and it is of interest to know that about the year 1628, five years after the Shakespeare First Folio had been published, he already possessed a copy of it, which eventually passed into the possession of "The Great Sheldon". This copy is happily still in existence. Therein is "a contemporary note" † that the copy was bought, in that year 1628, for £3. 15s. which, if so, was a very

* The Hearth Tax returns for 1674 show that there was still a Sheldon house at Beoley, for in that year "The Great Sheldon" was assessed on a house in that parish containing ten hearths, the next largest therein being of five hearths.

† Sir Sidney Lee, *Life of William Shakespeare* (ed. 1915), p. 564 n.

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extravagant price, for it had been published at £1, and the Folio was a "poor seller". The Sheldon arms are embossed on the covers of the copy in question. Some forty years later, about the year 1667, a connection of Sheldon, Walter Savage of Broadway, possessed a copy of Shakespeare's *Poems*, first published in 1639-40. The original price of the *Poems* was one shilling and fourpence, and Savage's copy was valued at eightpence in an inventory of his books.*

Sheldon died at Weston on 6 April, 1659—shortly before the resignation of Richard Cromwell as Lord Protector—aged 70, and was buried in the Beoley vault, near to his wife, who had died some two years previously. In the British Museum there is preserved the original "Bill of Charges",† an illiterate production, paid in connection with his death and burial. It begins on the preceding 4 April, from which it would appear that his end must have been sudden. A certain Dr Freeman is paid £1, Dr Elles, £5, and his man, £1, these amounts constituting the whole of the medical charges.

A mysterious item of "black and glue, 1s. 3d." follows; and then "paid to the vicare [?David Bordall] for the chauncell breeking it up, 1s.",‡ which would seem to be evidence that the vault beneath the chapel had not then been made: the parish clerk, 2s. 6d. "for is paines"; and to the ringers "for ringing and to macke the comparnie drincke, 18s. 6d."

* Barnard, *New Links with Shakespeare*, pp. 98-9.

† Add. MSS. 36583, f. 12 b.

‡ v. Chapter iv.

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Amongst other items, on 13 April the carrier received £5. 8s. for bringing down the black cloth and other things, presumably from London to remote Weston; 1s. 4d. was paid for “eight pound of piche”—possibly for the torches, and therefore the funeral would have been at the then fashionable hour of midnight—2s. 6d. on the same day for a journey from Beoley to Worcester to buy some lampreys, or it may be lamperns,* for which the Severn has long been noted; and another 2s. 6d. for a second journey to the same city, on 27 April, for a salmon and some lobsters, these two journeys possibly being undertaken for the refectation of “The Great Sheldon”, who had now come into the estates and may have paid a preliminary visit to Beoley to superintend the arrangements for the funeral there. He was always fastidious in his tastes, and particular as to the observance of Fridays.

There then follows one of several remarkable sums which were paid out during these funeral observances. It is of £111. 13s. paid for doles to the poor at Weston, Long Compton, Brailes, Shipston-on-Stour, and Beoley, places all so closely associated with the Sheldons; and £1 was paid to the ringers both at Brailes and at Beoley.

A certain Richard Hipton received £3. 15s. 4d. for “goinge down to Beoley with the funerall”; Mr Henry Croftes, “as apeares by his bill”, was paid 12s. 6d. for similar services; and James White charged 12s. “for

* In 1531 Prior William More paid 12d. for four pies of lamperns baked and given to the Greyfriars of Worcester.

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ribbons". It is just possible that the great cortège—for it must have been a great one—stopped for the night at Stratford-upon-Avon, about midway on the road to Beoley, for the actual funeral expenses are dated under 26 and 27 April, and at Stratford the large sum of £154. 5s. 10d. was paid there, "at the funerall agoing downe to Beoley and up", that is to say returning to Weston and so to London.

Finally a Mr Christopher Smithe was paid £5 for services otherwise unrecorded; Mr Crab, a mercer, "of Oster"—either Worcester or Alcester—presented his account and received as much as £49. 14s. 10d. "for moreninge ribones at the funerall"; "the Vicar of Beolye by my Master's orders", 10s., which seems to suggest that he performed the actual funeral ceremony; and then follows a note that "this bill of payments for the funeral charges of my master, William Sheldon, esquire", was delivered on 20 October, 1659, and amounted to £345. 3s. 9d.

This Sheldon's memorial is a flat marble ledger now fixed against the west aspect of the chancel arch and to its south side. The Latin inscription thereon may be translated as follows:

To God the best and greatest.

That [*istud*] marble covers the body of William Sheldon, esquire, whose flame aroused by death returned to Heaven, and there amid its kindred stars it burns and shines. He, devoted to his aged father, faithful to an unhappy King, loyal to the religion of his sires, succeeded late in life to a rich estate. Suddenly deprived of it on account of his

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inviolable loyalty to his King, he never mourned for it, but with equanimity bore its loss during his life.

He pleased God by his uprightness; his contemporaries by his courtesy; the poor by his generosity; the world by his goodness.

He had one wife, Elizabeth, daughter of Baron Petre, a most affectionate spouse, a tender mother, a woman to be revered, by whom he begat children, some who predeceased him, others who survived him; some who went to Heaven before him, others who followed.

Ralph, his eldest son, married Henrietta Maria, daughter of Thomas Viscount Rocksavage; Edward lived unmarried,* honoured amongst strangers.

George married Frances, daughter of Thomas More of Gubbins in the county of Hertford; Elizabeth married Thomas Gascoigne of Barneboe.

While he lived he was exposed to varying tides of adverse fortune, but he died aged 70

This memorial of his parent, worthy of marble, his heir has transmitted to posterity.

Having read these words, stranger, go, and take them as an exemplar for thine own life.

On a marble slab below this memorial are inscribed the following lines, of which a rather incorrect version is given by Nash:

Heer intomb'^d A Sheldon lyes
Whom not envyes' himself denyes
Nor suspicion ere could doubt
Verteous, loyall, wise, devout.
Hee in these oreturning times
Ownd his standing to noe crimes.
Some by others faults are knowne
High to rise, hee by his owne.

* He was a Benedictine monk at Douai.

WILLIAM SHELDON, 1588-9-1659

Elizabeth Sheldon had died some three years before, in the midst of the Commonwealth period, and was buried at Beoley where, in the chapel, there is a mural tablet to her memory, part in Latin, and part in English, the latter section being divided into two panels. Nash gives the full inscription.

Chapter VI

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623–1684

RALPH SHELDON, son and heir apparent of Edward and Elizabeth Sheldon, was born at Weston House, in the parish of Long Compton, on 4 August, 1623, and was thus in his infancy when Charles I came to the throne. It would appear that he was taken to Beoley when less than a week old, where the parish register evidences that he was baptized on 10 August following.

He, “The Great Sheldon”, a great antiquary, for his time, thus styled by his many friends, and particularly so by his devoted Anthony Wood, the Oxford antiquary, by reason of his exceeding integrity, charity, and hospitality, is said to have received his primary education in his father’s house, under Woodhope, the family priest. At the age of nineteen—in 1642, at the beginning of the Great Civil War—he began to travel, and ultimately resided in Rome for some years. Upon his return home—as already shown—he married, probably in 1647, Henrietta Maria,* daughter of Thomas Lord Rock-Savage, who shared in her husband’s various extravagant ways—of which their existing portraits present some little evidence.

* Probably so named after the Queen, Henrietta Maria of France.



HENRIETTA MARIA SHELDON (d. 1663)

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623-1684

The Oxfordshire and Berkshire tapestry map,* made by the Sheldon weavers and now to be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum, has woven in it the coat of arms of Sheldon impaling Savage. It was doubtless finished to form some memorial at Weston of this marriage, and would make an important addition to the tapestry maps which were already there.

“The Great Sheldon”—thus, as it happened, coming into the family estates at the Restoration—for the sufferings which he to some extent, and his father very considerably, had undergone during the War, had also been nominated by Charles II as worthy to receive the Order of Knight of the Royal Oak, if it had been instituted. For this purpose his estate was valued at £2000 per annum, the largest in Warwickshire except that of the Middlemores of Edgbaston.

The Knights were to have a silver medal with a device of the King in the oak, pendant to a ribbon about their necks, but the Order did not materialize for the reason that the proposed recipients, or many of them, were not prepared to make the financial contributions which the King required for the conferment of the honour he had in mind. The official explanation, however, was that it was thought proper to lay the idea aside, “lest the Order might create heats and animosities, and open those wounds afresh which at that time were thought prudent should be healed”.

It is also said, apparently without any real authority,

* *v.* Victoria and Albert Museum Portfolios, Tapestries, Part III, No. 4.

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623–1684

that Sheldon accompanied Charles II in his flight to Boscobel and was a party to his concealment in the oak. Certainly he was at the rendezvous at Worcester on 26 August, 1651, “in Pitchcroft, of such Loyal Subjects as came in to His Majesties aid in pursuance of his Declaration and Summons”.

In Birmingham Reference Library there is the original commission,* dated 13 May, 1661, under the hand and seal of his neighbour, the Earl of Northampton, of Compton Wynyates, co. Warwick, for Ralph Sheldon to seize all such greyhounds as may be mete and convenient for the disport and recreation of Charles II, and “all greyhounds, beagles, and whip-pets as may anyway be offensive to his Majesty’s game and disport”, within a circuit of ten miles of Weston.

That same year, on 1 October, 1661, the State Papers Domestic show that Sheldon, in his turn, was granted a pass to travel “for the recovery of his health with six servants and £50 to go abroad and to return to England when he thinks fit”. He was back again in 1663, in which year his wife, “a tall, proper and handsome woman”, died and was buried at Beoley, where in the chapel there is a mural tablet to her memory. There was no issue of the marriage, and Sheldon never married again.

All these circumstances, however, did not deter him from proceeding with the formation of an excellent library at Weston and from continuing his travels;

* Reference 167974.

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623–1684

and another stay in Rome some years after his wife's death enabled him to collect many rare books, medals, and coins. Wood says that two hundred and fifty manuscripts, besides many rolls of pedigrees, were left to him under the will of the unfortunate John Vincent, son of Augustus Vincent, Windsor Herald. This John Vincent had been pensioned by Sheldon for some years, in order to enable him to pursue his literary labours, and to arrange the medals, curiosities and pictures at Weston. The books, most of their bindings being stamped with the Sheldon arms, were placed in a large square wainscoted room over the kitchen; the medals and curiosities in a little room over the entrance into the hall; and the pictures in the long gallery.

Dr Bliss says: “This excellent collection of Books and Manuscripts was dispersed by auction at the Mansion house of Weston in 1781 by Christie and Ansell. I have the catalogue priced by John Denniss, bookseller of Middle Row, Holborn. Amongst the books sold was Shakespeare's first ed. 1623 with two other books for £2. 4/.”*

We have an instance† of the court which was paid to the Great Sheldon at this time, when on 7 August, 1673, Edmund Lechmere, of Hanley Castle, co.

* In Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses* (Vol. III, pp. 103–5), edited by Andrew Clark, M.A., and published by the Oxford Historical Society in 1894, there is a fuller reference to this matter, with illustrations of Ralph Sheldon's book plates. There is an illustration of his book stamp in *English Heraldic Book Stamps* (p. 338), by C. Davenport.

† E. P. Shirley, *Hanley and the House of Lechmere*, p. 45.

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623–1684

Worcester, was married to Lucy Hungerford. Concerning this event Sir Nicholas Lechmere, the Judge, wrote:

The marriage was solemnized at Black Borton [Bourton] in Oxfordshire, being y^e joynture of y^e widow lady Hungerford y^e mother, where noe cost was spared, indeed there was much needless expense, but the mother [Lady Hungerford] would have it soe.

There were present at y^e marriage y^e Lady Mother, y^e Lord and Lady ffalkland & one M^r Cary their kinsman, Sir Edward Stradling of S^t Donates in Glamorganshire & his lady, S^r Thomas Overbury, S^r Robert Henley of the Grainge neare Winchester & his lady, M^r Mountayn of Laycock in Wiltshire and his lady, M^r Dingley of Charlton [near Evesham], the great M^r Sheldon of Weston, and many with him. . . . Mr Sheldon of Weston and myself led the old Lady to her coach and waited upon her to church where M^r Sheldon continued all y^e solemnity. After that ended y^e Bride was delivered to M^r Sheldon & myself, who led her to her coach and waited upon her home. Benedicat Deus. Amen. Amen.

It has been said* that this Ralph Sheldon's expensive tastes and great hospitality at last, in 1678, brought M^r Marriett, High Sheriff for Warwickshire, accompanied by an Under-Sheriff, to Weston for the purpose of arresting him for debt. Apparently there is no evidence whatever for this statement, but there is definite evidence to account for a visit which Marriett paid to Weston in that year and for an entirely different purpose.

It was in July, 1678, that Titus Oates began to lay his infamous plans, and soon the whole country was

* E.g. F. L. Colville, *Warwickshire Worthies*, p. 681.

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623–1684

ringing with the Jesuit plot which, amongst other things, he alleged was to include the assassination of Charles II, and the accession to the throne of the Duke of York, who had probably become a Roman Catholic about the year 1670. The most stringent measures were, as we know, immediately taken against all Roman Catholics, which culminated in a proclamation which ordered the arrest of every one of them within the realm, allegations being made against all and sundry.

On 12 October, according to Wood, Weston House—or Weston Hall,* as it was sometimes styled—had already been searched for arms. Naturally some were found, as in any other country-house, and they were carried away “by 6 men under the command of Sir John Mordant on a plot of the Papists discovered a week before in London”. Now, with this proclamation also in force, the authorities had at once to take measures against Sheldon, as appears from the following undated letter which has come to light, during these researches, in the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum. It is in the West Papers,† and there is good reason for thinking that it was probably written on or about 22 November, 1678. The writer is one “H. Rugeley”, a Warwickshire Under-Sheriff, and the letter is addressed: “To the Right Worshipful

* In 1666, when exemplary punishment was being inflicted on those who spread scandalous reports, a man was found guilty for saying that he had seen Sir Henry Puckering, the M.P. for Warwick, at Mass at Weston Hall (State Papers Domestic, Charles II).

† Vol. iv, f. 30 (Add. MSS. 34730).

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623-1684

Thomas Mariet Esq., High Sheriff of Warwickshire, at Alscot, near Stratford-upon-Avon”, whose estates thereabouts eventually passed into the possession of the Wests.

Rugeley writes:

Honoured Sir.

Yesterday morning, as soon as I was get into my chamber at London, my Lord Chief Justice sent me a warrant to apprehend the bodies of M^r Ralph Sheldon of Weston, and M^r Griffin, his late steward, accused before him upon oath of High Treason to levy war against the King and to subvert the Government, with a strict charge that forthwith care should be taken for the execution of it, and a speedy account given to him or the House of Commons.

I stayed no longer in town than to advise what to do, and to make some enquiry at M^r Sheldon’s house in town where he was, and understand that he is now at Weston.

Sir, your personal attendance will be very requisite, with half a dozen men well-armed, because in the same warrant diligent search is to be made for all arms and treasonable papers, and to seize them.

I could get no further than Enstone,* and so thought it convenient to send this messenger on purpose to acquaint you, and to desire you would be pleased to meet me so soon as possibly you can to-morrow morning, upon the road between Weston and Shipston, or at Shipston at the Bear, for I will ride thither. It must be done to-morrow, for I must give an account on Saturday night or else, for anything I know, you may be fined and I committed, the Parliament are so hot about this business, as it behoves them. I send not the warrant itself because I must make use of it to command some constable to aid.

* For many years a well-known stopping-place, 14 miles north-west of Oxford, and therefore some 68 miles from London.

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623-1684

If it fall out so you cannot come, be pleased to send what men you can conveniently spare, well-armed, and I will do what I can.

Pray, Sir, dispatch the messenger forthwith who you please to do, if you cannot go yourself see what men you send along with him. The time is short and the term ends on Wednesday, that I shall be ruined every way if it be not dispatched to-morrow. I am so tired and sick that I can say no more but that I am

Your most obedient servant

H. RUGELEY.

Enstone, 9 o'clock.

Thursday night.

As a postscript Rugeley cautiously adds:

They are, if taken, to be brought before my Lord Chief Justice or before any other Justice of the county where they are taken, to be taken to the county gaol, there to remain till discharged by law.

I understand M^r Sheldon designs to appear willingly, so that I hope there will be no difficulty, but we must prepare for the worst.

A dignified and charming letter* from Ralph Sheldon, dated from Warwick Gaol on 25 January, 1678-9, at once shows that Rugeley had heard truly, at least as concerning him. Probably Griffin was equally amenable, and may have made up the “us” to whom Sheldon refers. He writes:

Sir,

As you have been very courteous and civil to me in this time of my confinement, so I should think myself a rude wretch and very ungrateful if I did not acknowledge it in the

* *Ibid.* f. 32.

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623–1684

best manner I am able. I thought therefore I could not do less than to acquaint you how my affairs stand.

I have this day received a letter from M^r Parker,* who sends me word that I shall have a Habeas Corpus sent hither to remove me on Monday. My baggage is not great, and so I can soon make up pack.

What they will do with us I am not able to tell. This I know, that as long as I bear the name of gentleman I must never forget to own your kindness to me, and so wishing yourself and family all health and prosperity, I rest, Sir,

Your very humble servant

RAPHE SHELDON.

This letter is addressed “For my honoured friend, Thomas Marriett Esq., at Arlescot”; and there is an endorsement in another hand: “From M^r Sheldon of Weston.”

Marriett, who had encountered a series of domestic and financial difficulties, especially towards the close of his life, died in 1691, and in a list† of his creditors there appears the name of an untraceable Edward Sheldon, “at the Barber’s pole over against the Dog Tavern in Drury Lane”.

There is at the British Museum,‡ documentary evidence dated 15 January, 1680, concerning a sum of £700 which, under specified conditions, Ralph Sheldon desired should at his death be distributed as follows:

I Raphe Sheldon do give & bequeath to the Monkes of the holy Order of St. Benedict of the English Congregation the summe of Five hundred pounds to the encrease of their

* Possibly a magistrate, and one of the Parkers of Honington, near Shipston-on-Stour.

† *Ibid.* f. 173.

‡ Add. MSS. 36583, f. 16.

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623-1684

Depositum in England; and by my Will, meaning and desire is, that, during the space of seaven yeares next after my decease out of the profitt of that money every Religious Man who is or shall bee actually in England on the day of my anniversary (bee hee Priest or Lay-brother) do receive halfe-a-crowne on my said anniversary day with this Obligation that each Priest do say one Mass of Requiem & each Lay-brother six tennes of his beades with a De profundis for my Soule: & this to continue for seaven yeares & no longer; the rest I referre to their Charity. Item my Will is that the summe of fifty pounds bee given unto the English Benedictine Nunnes now living in Cambray & this I bestow upon them in memory of my deare sister Katherine Sheldon who was a profest religious woman of that Monastery. Item I give & bequeath unto the English Benedictine Nunnes lately established in a new erected Monastery in Paris (I mean that Monastery of Nunnes whereof some of them came from Cambray to begin the community) the summe of fifty pounds. Item I do acknowledge to have a summe of one hundred pounds remaining in my hands as I was Executour to M^{rs} Elizabeth Stoker which said summe of one hundred pounds is to bee paid to the Convent of the English Benedictines at Douey after the decease of my brother Edward Sheldon; but the interest of the said summe is to be paid to him the said Edward Sheldon during his life as by her last Will & Testament will plainly appeare. Now my Desire is that the interest bee continued to bee paid unto Him my said brother during his life, & then the said summe of one hundred pounds to be paid to the said Convent of Benedictines immediately after the death of my said brother Edward Sheldon.

However, his will* made on 10 December, 1683, contains no reference to these matters; nor indeed, if its

* Birmingham Reference Library, No. 167638. The will is signed by Ralph Sheldon on every folio and sealed with the Sheldon arms.

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623–1684

evidence can be taken for granted, does it disclose Sheldon as having become a poor man, albeit his rash purchases of real estate must have depleted his resources; and then there were those miserable Titus Oates and other troubles, too.

In the will is, amongst a number of others, a bequest to Frances Sheldon, one of his cousins, “maid of honour to the Queen’s Majestie”, of “my Helitropean [bloodstone] Crosse”; to “my friend and fellow antiquary Anthony à Wood of Merton College, Oxford”, of £40, and he to see that all the pedigree books, etc. given to the Heralds’ College are delivered there and placed in a cupboard apart; and to Ralph Sheldon, his heir and executor, £400, “and the best furniture in one of my chambers at Weston, *videlicet* blankets, chairs, stools and hangings”.

Perhaps in this association a note should be added concerning this Ralph Sheldon’s aforementioned cousin Frances, who was a daughter of Edward, of Stratton, co. Gloucester, third son of Edward Sheldon (d. 1643) of Beoley. She was a maid of honour to Catherine of Braganza, wife of Charles the Second. Sheldon seems to have been much attached to her, rather to Wood’s annoyance, and she was often at Weston after the death of Henrietta Maria Sheldon.

Under 13 November, 1682, at Oxford, Wood writes: “Mr S. with the M[aid] of H[onour] at the Miter at 4 p.m. in the afternoon”. Shortly afterwards he notes that Sheldon has acknowledged that “he did promise to print my book but the times are altered and he is



“THE GREAT SHELDON”
(*Ralph Sheldon, 1623-1684*)

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623-1684

not able. Yet he is able to throw money away—2 or 300 li.—to alter his house for the sake of the M. of H., and he gives her and her brothers what they please.”

A year afterwards Wood notes: “Mr R. Sheldon with me to look at my transcripts and papers which I had done for his sake and he said he would give me 100 li. to print my *Bibliotheca*”, which was afterwards published as *Athenae Oxonienses*.

Frances Sheldon was not long in removing at least the collection of medals from Weston to London where, under 3 December, 1684, John Evelyn notes, in his Diary, that “I carried Mr Justel and Mr Slingsby (Master of the Mint) to see Mr Sheldon’s collection of medals. The series of Popes was rare, and so were several amongst the moderns. . . . They were held at a price of £1000; but not worth, I judge, above £200”, which one would expect him, with his frugal mind, to say. It seems, indeed, that the whole sale realized far less a sum than had been generally anticipated.

The College of Heralds still, of course, possesses this Vincent Sheldon collection, and also a portrait inscribed: “Ralph Sheldon. Born A.D. 1623. Died A.D. 1684.” There has been a tradition that this portrait was bequeathed to the College by Sheldon himself, but Mr Aubrey J. Toppin, F.S.A. (York Herald) has lately found that actually it was purchased by the College in 1824, for £9. 19s.

The accompanying illustration of a portrait now in the possession of Mrs Veitch (*née* de Sheldon), of Hexham, and reputed to be that of “The Great

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623–1684

Sheldon”, is here reproduced by her kind permission and that of the President and Council of the Society of Antiquaries. It was first published in “The Sheldon Tapestry Weavers and their Work” (*Archaeologia*, Vol. LXXVIII).

Wood, in his “Life and Times”,* naturally makes many references to Ralph Sheldon—whom he seems first to have met at Oxford in July, 1671—and to his many visits to Weston, some twenty-five miles distant therefrom. At Weston he was for a long time engaged in cataloguing the library, and doing research-work for Sheldon, and thus had to keep there the whole of Lent, 1676, “and ate no flesh”, which he—a wavering Protestant—adds that he had never done before.

Sheldon appears from time to time to have become rather tired of Wood and his long visits, but after the death of “my ever honoured friend”, Wood was sent to Weston by the executor, young Ralph Sheldon, to take orders about the funeral. This was on 27 June, 1684, and two days afterwards he left for Steeple Barton where the heir was living, there “to see the scutcheons, streamers, shuffrons, and hatchments made”. On 4 July he was back at Weston, “with the painter...and a man to carry the furniture for the funeral”.

Two days later, “In the afternoon after I had caused the Hall at Weston, Staircase, Dining roome, and roome of state to be hung with scocheons”, Sheldon’s

* *Transactions of the Oxford Historical Society*, Vols. 19, 21, 26, 30, and 40.

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623–1684

body was laid in state and viewed by about five hundred country folk, and we are further told that he had gained “the universal esteem of all the gentlemen of the county”. How they contrived to reach that very inaccessible place, even difficult of approach in these days, must be left to the imagination. Again on the three following days, and certainly they were July days, the narrow and winding roads and lanes to Weston—later on (*c.* 1715) significantly known as Weston-in-the-Thistles—were presumably thronged with the curious countryfolk, for “The 7th, 8th and 9th in the afternoon he laid in state from 2 till 6”.

The next day, at six in the morning, Sheldon’s body was carried from Weston, “in a chariot hung with scocheons and streamers, the six horses with scocheons and shuffrons* and about 8 couples of blacks† before besides 4 streamers and myself”, says Wood.

Thus the cortège, another impressive sight, passed to Beoley by way of Stratford-upon-Avon, that wonted twenty miles of road so familiar to several generations of Sheldons and their servants, in their constant comings and goings between Beoley and Weston. Wood continues: “About 2 o’clock we arrived at Beoley Church where he was buried. After wards I dined at Skilts. Thursday, the last day of July, I came

* Shaffrons. “1725. J. Coats, *Dict. Her.* (1739). 73. Those little Shields containing Death’s Heads and other Funeral Devices, plac’d upon the Foreheads of the Horses, that draw Hearses at Pompous Funerals, vulgarly now call’d, by corruption, Chaperoons or Shefferoons.” (Murray, *N.E.D.*)

† Mourners.

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623–1684

to Oxon and the next day I returned to Weston where I continued till Friday Aug. 22, at what time was brought with me in a waggon the MSS. and Pedigrees that M^r Sheldon bequeathed to the Heralds’ Office.”

Soon after the funeral Wood wrote to Sir William Dugdale, the great historian, a letter of relevant interest which was eventually published by William Hamper (1776–1831), the Warwickshire antiquary, and editor of Dugdale’s Correspondence. It begins as follows:

Your letter of 7th July I received at Stratford upon our passage to Beoley the 10th of the same month, to convey the corpse of our deceased friend to his grave, but we making no stay there I could not have time to read it, much less to answer it.

As for the flags or streamers that were carried by 4 neighbouring gentlemen, I have persuaded the executor and heir to let them hang over his grave but for one year, with which motion they seem contented....

The following contemporary and dignified entry is in the Beoley register:

Ralph Sheldon Esq. Lord of the manoure of Beoley died in his mansion house of Weston in the parish of Long Compton in Warwickshire on the day of S^t John Baptist comonly called Midsomer day an: 1684 aged 61 or thereabouts and was buried neare his wife the Lady Henrietta Maria Savage and his ancestors on the 10th day of July following in a vault situate and being under our Ladies Chappell joyning to S^t Leonard’s Church before mentioned.

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623-1684

A relevant entry, which must have been compiled by the same hand, also appears in the Long Compton register, with added details:

Ralphe Sheldon of Beoly in Worcestershire Esq., departed this mortall life in his house called Weston in the parish of Long Compton, on the 24 of June (midsomer day) an. 1684 aged 61 or thereabouts, whereupon his heart and bowells were buried in Long Compton Chancell neare to those of his father*, mother†, grandfather‡ etc. on the day following, and his body by those of his ancestors in a vault situate & being under the Chappell of our Lady joining to S^t Leonards Church of Beoly before mentioned, on the 10 July following.

In the year 1922 the then Vicar of Long Compton, (Rev. G. Griffith Williams), who kindly supplied the foregoing transcription, wrote that an old parishioner had informed him that when the restoration of the church was begun in 1861, “the floor of the chancel was taken up, and at the east end, near the altar, three little brick graves were discovered, each containing a small coffin covered with red baize and studded with brass nails, bright and perfect. The graves were not disturbed.” They undoubtedly contain the heart and viscera of Ralph Sheldon and his forbears. Otherwise there is no memorial of Ralph Sheldon in Long Compton church.

On the lid of Ralph Sheldon’s coffin, which still lies near to that of his wife in the vault at Beoley, is a bold casting of the arms of the Sheldon family, beneath

* William Sheldon, d. 1659.

† Elizabeth, daughter of Lord Petre, d. 1656.

‡ Edward Sheldon, d. 1643.

“THE GREAT SHELDON”, 1623–1684

which on a leaden plate is the following inscription:
“Ralph Sheldon of Beoley Esq^r departed this life on
Tuesday the 24 of June Anno Dom. 1684. On whose
soule God have mercy. Amen. Aetat. suae. 60.”

Above, in the church, is a memorial to him. The
terse and pathetic inscription thereon runs: Quondam |
Radulphus Sheldon | Nunc | cinis, pulvis, nihil. |
Fidelium animae | per misericordiam Dei | Requiescant
in pace. | Obiit 24 die mensis Junii | Anno Domini
1684.

Chapter VII

THE LAST SHELDONS

As "The Great Sheldon" had no issue, and as his brother, Edward, the Benedictine, is said piously to have refused to intermeddle with secular affairs, he left his estate to the aforementioned Ralph Sheldon, of Steeple Barton, esquire, his next heir-male, son of Edward Sheldon, his first cousin.

There does not appear to be any existing record of the birth of this latest Ralph Sheldon, which must have been in 1652, or thereabouts. He married Mary Anne, daughter of John Elliot, of Gatacre Park, co. Salop, and grand-daughter, on the maternal side, of Richard Watson, surgeon to Charles I. Of this marriage there were three sons and three daughters, one of whom, Mary, became a nun, four successive generations of Sheldons being represented by at least one member in religion.

Ralph Sheldon died in 1720, and was succeeded by his eldest son, Edward, born in 1679 and buried at Beoley in 1736. He married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir John Shelley, a Sussex landowner, and had four sons and three daughters. Of the sons, Henry and Ralph became Jesuits; the former died in Rome and the latter in Liége. Catherine, the third daughter, was a Benedictine nun in France.

THE LAST SHELDONS

Upon the death of Edward Sheldon the estates passed to his eldest son, William, born in 1715, who married Margaret Frances, daughter of James Rooke, of Bigsweir, co. Gloucester, of which marriage there were six sons, three of whom were in military service, and one daughter, Margaret Frances, who married Francis Talbot, a brother of George, Earl of Shrewsbury.

Of the sons, the eldest, Ralph—a name which had long been traditional in the family—was destined to become the last of the Sheldons of Weston and Beoley, although indeed Beoley is seldom mentioned at that later period. He was born on 14 September, 1741, and in 1780 married Jean, eldest daughter of Admiral Francis Holbourne, of Menstrie, co. Clackmannan. There were one son and three daughters by this marriage: Edward Ralph Charles, the heir and latterly of Brailes; Catherine, who died unmarried in 1818; Jean Louise, who married Robert Fellowes, of Shottesham Park, co. Norfolk; and Fanny Anne, who married the Comte d'Orfeuille, of Poitiers, and died childless.

Ralph Sheldon appears to have taken an active part in the local affairs of Warwickshire and Oxfordshire, and was Colonel of the Oxford Loyal Volunteers. On 16 February, 1819, he and his heir sold the Weston estate to Mr G. Philips, the great grandfather of the Earl of Camperdown. A lease of Weston was at this time held by Lord Clonmel, who remained there till 1827, when it was decided to build a new house there, which was finished in 1832.

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The engraving of Weston from which the accompanying frontispiece is taken appeared in *The Antiquarian Repertory* (2nd ed., published in 1780). In the letterpress therein it is stated that "the drawing was made in 1773", and further, that "Queen Elizabeth visited Weston; an apartment in that house still retains the name of the Queen's Chamber, as does another that of the Maids of Honours' Room; her coat-of-arms still remains over the front door". Perhaps it is permissible to wonder whether the writer is actually referring to the Queen's Maids, or to that Maid of Honour who, as shown, was disliked by Wood in 1682.

It is added that then several of the Sheldon tapestry maps "still hang in the large room here. The house is situated on a fine knole from which the Lawn gradually descends and is bounded by clumps and a grove of parge trees, etc."

This illustration shows the altered house with a triple arcade entrance. Part of the gatehouse appears. The formal garden in the large Dugdale print (Thomas ed., Vol. I, p. 583) has disappeared, and there has been considerable alteration in the front aspect. It is interesting to compare this representation with the print in the Aylesford Collection of Warwickshire County Seats (Vol. II, p. 740) in Birmingham Reference Library. There is also one in the Timmins Collection (p. 71) in the same Library.

Miss Margaret Dickins, who writes with much authority as a local historian, says—in a chapter on Weston in her *Little History of Cherington and Stourton*,

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Warwickshire, published in 1934—that the house contained a chapel in which was the carving afterwards made into a reredos for Cherington church. “In 1805”, Miss Dickins continues, “the Cherington Award speaks of ‘the hamlet or Lordship of Weston’. That year the last Ralph Sheldon of Weston was living in the Elizabethan house there. Although there was a public right of way through his lands, he had the gate at the top of Harrow Hill locked.

“Thomas Dickins, a barrister, riding from London to visit his uncle at Cherington House, was stopped by this gate, and knowing it to be a right of way he engaged a passing carter to harness his horses to the gate and drag it open. The next day Mr Sheldon challenged Mr Dickins to fight a duel, adding ‘You may beat down my gates but you cannot make a gentleman put up with an insult.’ As he would hear no reason Mr Dickins took the matter to a Court of Law and won his case.

“A few years later the manor of Weston was bought by Mr George Philips, who pulled down the beautiful old house and built a new mansion. . . . The heiress of the Philips family married the second Earl of Camperdown, and Weston remained in that family till the death of the third Earl, when it was left by him to Mr H. A. Warriner. . . .” This mansion remained tenantless for some time and finally, for various good reasons, it was demolished, the end being reached in May, 1934.

It is of relevant interest to refer to a gossiping letter

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in the Baigeant Collection now preserved at Downside Abbey. It was written on 29 September, 1856, by Mary Winter, who was the married grand-daughter of the aforementioned William and Margaret Frances Sheldon. Therein she says—and she was evidently and amusingly biased—that the Sheldon family now reside at Brailes, and that the aforementioned Jean Sheldon (*née* Holbourne) was “a Protestant lady of extravagant habits and bad principles”. She gambled away, so the letter continues, much of the Sheldon property, and thereby involved her old husband in financial difficulties. He, in the latter part of the 18th century, became a Protestant, with the idea of improving his position.

Edward Ralph Charles Sheldon (1782–1836) succeeded to the gradually impaired estates and, as was his son, was a member of the Church of England. For some years he was one of the Brailes churchwardens, and took a great and active interest in the restoration of that very fine church—“the Cathedral of the Feldon”—in 1879. He was a Member of Parliament for South Warwickshire, Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant for that county, and a Major in the Warwickshire militia. The inscription upon his tomb in Brailes churchyard shows that he died on 11 June, 1836, aged 54. He had married one Marcella Winstanley, an Irish lady—daughter of Meredith Winstanley (*Dublin Herald*)—who survived him, and supervised the estate for her son, Henry James Sheldon, during his minority. She eventually became a Roman

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Catholic and, like so many Sheldons, died abroad, being buried in Boulogne.

This Henry James Sheldon (1823–1901), of Brailes House, married Alicia Mary, widow of William Oakeley, esquire, of Oakeley Park, co. Salop, and daughter of General Sir Evan Lloyd. She died childless on 13 March, 1896, aged 79, and her husband, who was a Justice of the Peace for Warwickshire, and High Sheriff for that county in 1860, died in 1901, aged 78.

The end of the Sheldon story is actually told in the inscription upon the tomb of this Sheldon, who proudly claimed to be seventeenth in direct descent from Edward III. The tomb is in Brailes churchyard, and its inscription was copied in 1922. There are also commemorated thereon the abovenamed Alicia Mary Sheldon, and two infant daughters of Edward Ralph Charles Sheldon and Marcella, his wife.

The inscription in question is:

“To the loving memory of Henry James Sheldon of Brailes House who died Dec. 24th, 1901, aged 78. This monument was erected by his only sister, Isabel Calmady, the last of the Sheldons.”

Chapter VIII

THE SHELDON CHAPEL AND VAULT IN BEOLEY CHURCH

THE Sheldon Chapel, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, is attached to the north aspect of the chancel of the church of St Leonard, Beoley. Its style may be described as decadent Gothic, and it possesses no great architectural value. Its east wall has three arched recesses or arcades, between and above which are two windows, each of three lights.

The exact date of the erection of this chapel by Ralph Sheldon is not known, but it was probably in the last years of the 16th century. As already shown (pp. 4, 6), the existing memorials to his great-uncle, William (d. 1517), and to his grandfather, Ralph (d. 1546), are both dated, the first being set up in one of the arcades in the north wall in 1600, and the second in the adjoining arcade in 1601. The third arcade in this wall contains the doorway into the chapel from outside, incidentally providing a nearer entrance from the old Sheldon mansion. Above these arcades are two windows, each of three lights.

The north wall of the 12th century chancel must have been taken down to its foundations to admit the canopied tomb which Ralph Sheldon also erected to his father and mother, William and Mary Sheldon,

THE SHELDON CHAPEL AND VAULT

and whereon their effigies lie; and perhaps a year or two later “the Tombe laste erected wherein my wife lyethe”—who had died in 1603—also with effigies. Incidentally it may be noted that during the repair of this tomb in 1922 it proved to be empty, and that there is a small chamber beneath it.

Both these tombs, which Mrs Arundell Esdaile ascribes to one of the two Southwark studios then producing alabasters, were elaborately gilded and painted, and the numerous coats-of-arms tinctured in heraldic colours. In the careful cleaning which they also underwent in 1922 the colours have greatly revived, especially those on the tomb of Ralph Sheldon, the founder of the chapel. The gold, however, has lost its bright surface. The tomb of William Sheldon has suffered much more from excessive damp and consequent decay, and the colours are either faint or have disappeared altogether.

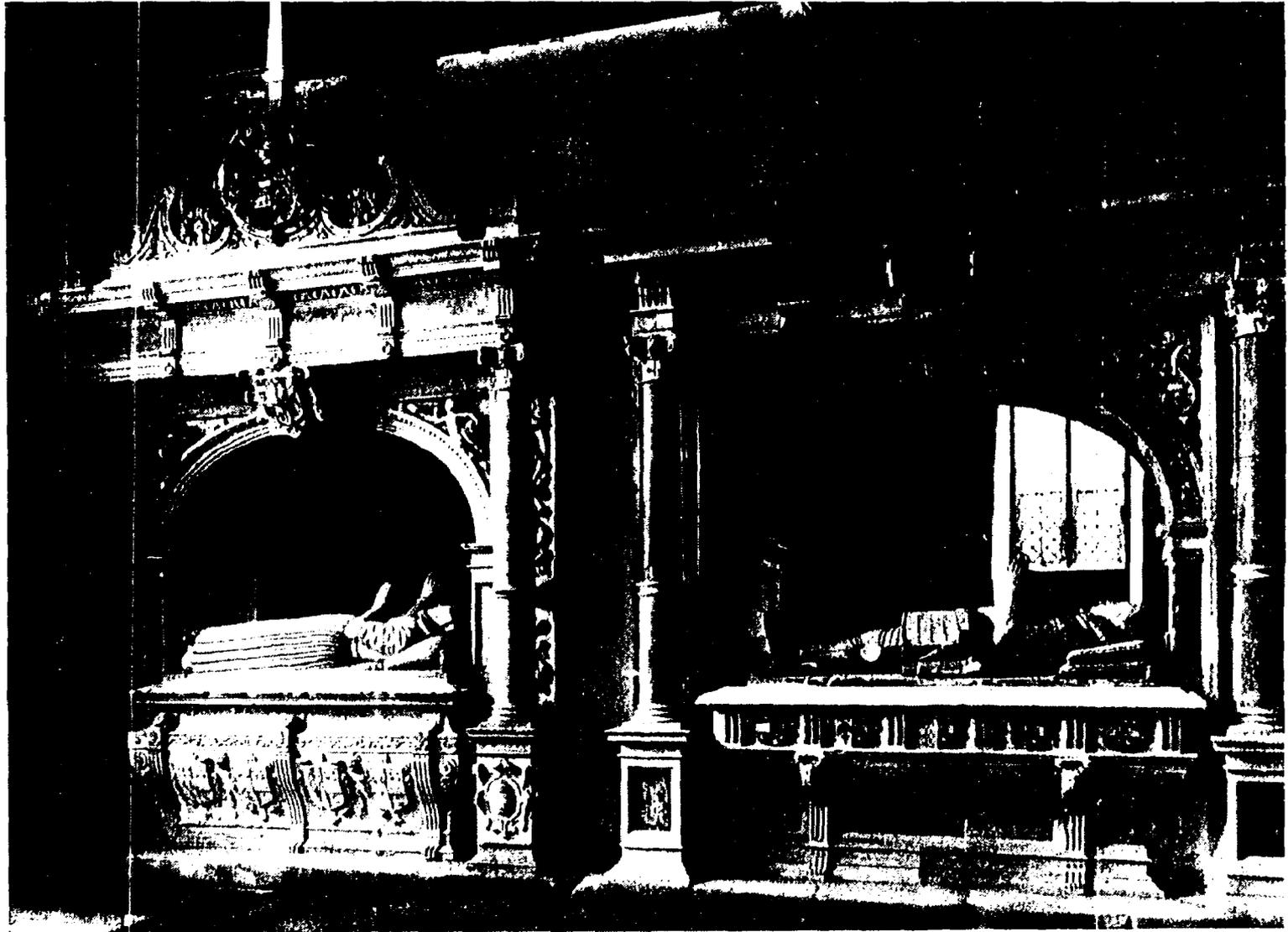
A fully-detailed description* of the tombs and of their heraldry is not necessary, but some brief account of them should be recorded here.

The effigies of William and Mary Sheldon repose side by side, she being on his left. He is armed in the dress of the period excepting his head and hands. His head has a helmet for a pillow, with the crest, wreath, and mantling, and at his feet are gauntlets. Mary Sheldon's head, with cap and neck ruff, lies on an

* It will be found in the Sheldon Miscellanea at Birmingham Reference Library; also less fully, in V.C.H. *Worcs.* Vol. iv, pp. 17-18; and Nash, *op. cit.* Vol. 1, pp. 69-71.

(1)

(2)



TOMB OF (1) WILLIAM (d. 1570) AND MARY SHELDON, AND (2) OF
RALPH (d. 1613) AND ANNE SHELDON, IN BEOLEY CHURCH
(Photographed from the chapel)

IN BEOLEY CHURCH

embroidered and tasselled cushion; her dress is of the period, and at her feet rests a dog.

Above the arch, on both sides, there are Latin verses, which begin on the wall carrying the arch and above the heads of the effigies, thus:

De Gulielmo Sheldon Ricardus Eedes Decanus Vigorn.

Quod te qui post te possim describere, partim
Fama tui, partim fecit imago tui,
Fama tuas loquitur virtutes, filius illas
Eloqvitur; superest qui superare studet.

And so on.

It would be interesting to know how and why Richard Eedes, eighth Dean of Worcester (1597–1604), about the year 1601 thus came to be associated with this memorial to a man who had died when he himself was but a boy of fifteen; whom he had presumably never seen or known; and of whom he says—if one may hazard a translation of the above: “Your good reputation partly and partly your likeness (the son) have made it possible for me, after your death, to describe you. Good report speaks of your virtues, and your son too tells them forth: he survives you and strives to surpass you.”

All these Latin verses came from the pen of the Dean, upon whose tomb* in Worcester Cathedral there are also Latin verses in the fashionable monumental style of the period. Eedes may have been an

* *The Cathedral Church of Worcester: Its Monuments and their Stories*, by the Very Rev. W. Moore Ede, late Dean, pp. 117–119, with portrait.

THE SHELDON CHAPEL AND VAULT

old friend of Ralph Sheldon, possibly contemporary with him at Oxford, and perhaps anxious to eulogize his father, but his religious outlook was very different to that of Sheldon. The Dean was unhesitatingly Protestant, Ralph Sheldon was unhesitatingly Roman Catholic, and yet this association, and the added and very unusual fact that the name of the Dean as the writer of the verses is actually recorded on the tomb, as also is his ecclesiastical dignity.

So the verses continue, but not as directly concerning William Sheldon, to whom there is also the other memorial adjacent, the inscription upon which is given elsewhere (pp. 26-7).

Wood, in his *Athenae Oxonienses*, says that Eedes was made Dean of Worcester on 19 June, 1597, "being then and ever after to his death held in great admiration at court, not only for his preaching, but most excellent and polite discourse....He became chaplain to James I, and was appointed as a translator of the Bible, but died before the commencement of the undertaking."

The easy comparison of the uninscribed tomb—the heraldry being there left to tell its story—of Ralph Sheldon with that of his father shows that they differ considerably in detail. Ralph Sheldon's tomb was evidently erected by his son Edward, when he set up the associated inscription (*v.* pp. 41-2) elsewhere in the chapel in the year 1613, or a little later. In this instance the effigy of the wife, Anne *née* Throckmorton, lies on the right of her husband. He is clad in armour,

IN BEOLEY CHURCH

his bare head resting on two cushions; his feet rest against gauntlets. She is clothed in a gown of the period, with head-dress and ruffle. Her head also rests on two cushions; there is only a plain, chamfered stone at her feet.

Dr John Humphreys, in his *Elizabethan Sheldon Tapestries*, gives illustrations of portraits of William and Ralph Sheldon, in the possession of Lord Stafford, Swynnerton Park, Staffordshire. These portraits, however, can scarcely be considered as being contemporary. In both instances the inscriptions thereon err as to the age of the Sheldon represented, and the portraits do not bear the least similarity to those of the clean-shaven faces of the effigies on these tombs, which there is every reason to think would be represented as truly and carefully as possible.

The west wall of the chapel has an opening into the nave of the church, from which opening some modern wooden and adjustable steps, covering the entrance to the vault, descend to the floor of the north aisle. The east wall contains a large window of fine lights.

Beneath this window is a large mensa of faded black marble, for such it appears to be, which according to tradition was presented by Pope Gregory XIII, the reformer of the Calendar, to Ralph Sheldon in 1580. There are no consecration crosses. Beneath it is a smaller mensa of white stone with Renaissance carving round the edges. These mensae stand together on a range of small columns. Probably the smaller mensa would be the gift, if such, of the Pope.

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Whether or not the presence of these mensae may be taken as an indication that the chapel was at one time used by the Sheldons for the Latin Rite, side by side with that of the English Rite, is a subject which, interesting as it is, cannot be discussed here. Be this as it may, there is every evidence that for many years the relation between the family and the parishioners was one of great accord, and that this was particularly the case under the Ralph Sheldon régime. William Sheldon, his father, had been a strong supporter of the Reformed Faith at the time of the Dissolution—he then being in his prime—and as such he died, but the chapel had of course not then been built. Then succeeded Ralph Sheldon, who doubtless had been brought up in his father's convictions but who, as already said, as a young man returned, full of devotion, to the Old Faith, in which he remained steadfast until the end, as did so many contemporary and succeeding Sheldons, despite at times the manifold tribulations through which some of them had to pass for great love of it.*

The Beoley registers, which begin in 1558, throughout bear silent testimony of goodwill on both sides, for Sheldons are chronicled therein under christenings, marriages and deaths; the church itself, as well as the chapel, contains a number of Sheldon memorials; the

* John Noake, in his *Guide to Worcestershire*, says that the Beoley estate was formerly chargeable with £40 a year to support "a mass house or residence and chapel" for a Roman Catholic priest, and adds that he hears that this sum is now (1868) paid to the priest at Redditch.

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inscriptions on three of the Beoley church bells* are associated with Sheldons. The tenor bell of the year 1601 bears the name of "Rafe Sheldon Esquier", together with those of the two churchwardens; another, dated 1622, has "Ed. Sheldon Esquier R. Sheldon", and two churchwardens; and another, dated 1708, "Radolphus Sheldon de beoley Armiger", also with the two churchwardens. Other evidences of a similar nature could also be advanced.

Inserted in the floor of the chapel, of which the greater part is laid with red quarries, is an inscribed brass to the memory of Frances, sister of William Sheldon. She died in July, 1631, and presumably—according to the inscription, part Latin and part English—she was buried there. However, there is no relevant record in the parish registers.

The main vault beneath the chapel is entered by six steps. On its east wall are two torch-holders of mortar, and a third on the west wall north of the entrance.

At the present time, as in 1885, there are only seven bodies in the vault, the earliest in date being that of "The Great Sheldon"—the antiquary—who died in 1684. From 1546 to 1784 six lords of the manor are recorded in the registers as being buried in the church, as also Anne (*née* Throckmorton, d. 1603), wife of Ralph, the builder of the chapel; Elizabeth (*née* Petre, d. 1656), wife of William Sheldon (1588–1659); and

* H. B. Walters, "Church Bells of Worcestershire", *Trans. Worcs. Arch. Soc.* Vol. II, pp. 25–9.

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Henrietta Maria (*née* Savage, d. 1663), wife of “The Great Sheldon”. Yet of these nine persons only the bodies of the two last-mentioned are definitely stated in the registers to have been placed in this vault.

It seems probable, therefore, that the vault constitutes a much later adjunct to the chapel, and that it may have been excavated soon after the death of William Sheldon in 1659, and before the decease of Henrietta Maria Sheldon in 1663. If the epitaph to this William Sheldon is to be taken literally he lies near his memorial on the south side of the west arch of the chancel. It would thus appear most likely that the Sheldons of Beoley were buried in the chancel till about 1663, but it is always possible that there was, and still is, an earlier vault beneath the chancel, and of this there seemed to be some slight evidence in 1922, when a careful examination of the whole structure was made.

On the south side of the vault is a small opening which leads into a little chamber of the same date as the vault. This is the ossuary, in which uncoffined skulls and bones were deposited. In 1885—according to Mr H. S. Gunn, of Great Alne, who at that time made a series of valuable and very detailed notes* concerning the things which he then both heard and saw at Beoley during the restoration—there was there an earthenware keg without a lid, which was said to have

* “The Sheldon Vault and Ossuary”, *Evesham Journal*, 20 May, 1922. Mr Albert Smith, of Redditch, also supplied very useful information at this time.

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contained the viscera of the Ralph Sheldon who died in 1822; and also a heap of bones together with some six or eight skulls. Little remained there in 1922.

It was the earnest wish of the Rev. C. Langston, who was so devotedly concerned with the restoration of the church in 1885, then to raise sufficient funds for the Sheldon chapel and monuments to be included in the work, but all his appeals for this section of the work to be undertaken fell on utterly deaf ears, and he had regretfully to abandon the project.*

Mr Gunn was of the opinion that there must have been great desecration of the vault, and that a possible explanation of its condition was that it had been raided for lead by Parliamentarian troops. However, as shown above, it was in all probability not made until the close of the Commonwealth period. Thus it would seem that its sad condition must have slowly arisen from the great dampness therein and thereabouts, and evidently from rats as a contributing cause; added to which there is the definite fact that the vault, rather easily accessible, was raided by thieves on one occasion, and possibly also at a later time, in search for family jewels that were traditionally supposed to have been buried with some of the dead there.

The vault measures 16 ft. by 13 ft. by 6 ft. high, and has an arched roof. Opposite the entrance stand on wooden cross-pieces six coffins in a row side by side, and a seventh in another position. The first in order is a

* G. K. Stanton, *Rambles and Researches among Worcestershire Churches*, Vol. II, p. 209.

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leaden coffin in perfect preservation, the handles and inscribed plate being also of lead. On the lid is a bold casting of the arms of Sheldon, beneath which on the plate is inscribed: "Ralphe Sheldon of Beoly esq^r departed this life on Tuesday the 24 of June, Anno Dōm 1684. One [*sic*] whose sovlē God have mercy Amen aetat svae 60." This body of "The Great Sheldon" was embalmed.

The adjoining coffin, if such it can be called, has no record, but incidentally it supplies further evidence of the former dampness of the vault. For early in the 19th century the original coffin had decayed so badly, leaving the embalmed figure of a man entirely uncased, that the then owner of Beoley, named Holmes-Hunter, had it placed in a new oak shell which, again in 1922, was found already to have decayed very considerably.

The next coffin, long and narrow, the outer coffin having perished, is that of Henrietta Maria, the young wife of "The Great Sheldon". She died mysteriously in London, it is said possibly of the plague, on 13 June, 1663. Mr Gunn noted a detached brass crucifix lying on the lid of the coffin, but in 1922 it had disappeared.

The other coffins, the fourth being very much decayed, all bear inscriptions denoting later Sheldons. These are fully recorded by Mr Gunn, the last being commemorative of "Ralphe Sheldon Esq^r. died 22nd of November 1822, aged 82 years", who was the last lord of the manor in the Sheldon line, and the last Sheldon to be buried in the vault.

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Returning to the chapel, the various Sheldon inscriptions there and elsewhere in the church itself were carefully recorded by Habington, together with much heraldic and other detail. As already suggested, he probably visited Beoley in the year 1643 or thereabouts, and much happened in the Sheldon family, and at Beoley, before the inscriptions—copied from Habington—again fully appeared in Nash's *Worcestershire*, published in 1781, at which time that historian was of course able to make a number of additions, which naturally have increased but little since then.

It is conceivable then that in its earlier years the chapel may have been used by the Sheldons for their own religious offices and devotions, but after the Great Civil War, and the trouble that it incidentally brought to the Beoley mansion, they turned to Skilts, and particularly—as time went on—to Weston, which became the focus of their family-life, although they always looked to Beoley as their actual and eventual resting-place.

Therefore, all things considered, it is not surprising to know that the chapel was ultimately put to other good uses, and that when Dr Prattinton, the Worcester-shire antiquary, visited the church in August, 1826, he noted that the chapel was then “profusely covered with ivy, thus making it much too dark for a School, the purpose to which it was then applied, and which is made habitable in the winter by a stove in the centre, and screens filling up the arches of the monuments. . .”.

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This use was still remembered by old inhabitants of Beoley some twenty years ago, and the chapel has also often been used as a Sunday School.

Despite, however, all the vicissitudes of time and use, it is remarkable that the Sheldon monuments as a whole have suffered so little from the actual hand of man, if indeed at all, during the three eventful centuries, and more, since their erection was begun, especially when one recalls the dire fate of some other local monuments, and notably the mutilated effigies recumbent upon them, during that period.

However, the Sheldon chapel until recent years always had one great and natural enemy, *Damp*, and its baneful presence successfully withstood those who very laudably undertook restoration and repair there, for instance in 1885 and particularly in 1891. This condition had doubtless arisen in the earliest days of the chapel, and it can never have been more apparent than it was when three friends visited it, full of enthusiasm for the history of the Sheldons, on a sombre day of relentless wind and rain late in October, 1920, with the churchyard strewn with myriad leaves from the surrounding trees.

Such were the circumstances under which the chapel, its two oldest tombs green and slimy with their trouble, and the walls and floor saturated with it, made a mute and very sad appeal. The Sheldon glory had indeed departed!

A hurried visit to the then Vicar (Rev. Herbert Sleigh), close at hand, at once succeeded—although



ST LEONARD'S CHURCH AND THE SHELDON CHAPEL, BEOLEY, IN 1884

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until that moment we were unknown to him—for if the chapel were thus, what must be the condition of the Sheldon vault, which it transpired that he had never entered. Its key soon answered the question for, the steps having been removed, on opening the door the interior was revealed, by the light of a candle, to be in a far worse state, with a skull and many bones—presumably from a broken coffin lying on one of the cross-pieces—heaped on the floor in an inch or so of filthy water. An autumn reverie.

Then came the determination, made that same day, that everything possible must be done, and for every good reason, to remedy this state of affairs. The keen and sympathetic interest of the Vicar and Mrs Sleigh, of Mr Albert Mahler (churchwarden), and of Sir Philip Stott—with his expert knowledge and financial help—was quickly assured, and after the requisite approval of the diocesan and parochial authorities had been received, a public meeting was held at Redditch on 28 January, 1922, at which the Earl of Plymouth presided, and Dr John Humphreys lectured on “The Romance of the Sheldons of Beoley”, after which Mr P. B. Chatwin reported as to the condition of the chapel, the vault, and the Sheldon tombs, and the urgent need for their repair. It was then unanimously resolved to appoint a Committee and officers, which was done, and to issue an appeal for funds.

The rest of the story may be best told in the words of the final report of the Committee, issued to the subscribers some eighteen months later:

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“...With further reference to a letter to you dated 25th October, 1922, we have pleasure in informing you that all the work contemplated in connection with the Sheldon Chapel (Chapel of St Mary the Virgin) and Monuments therein, in Beoley Church, has now been completed.

“It will be within the recollection of subscribers to the fund that the committee decided to postpone the completion of the work in the chapel and vault until after the new system of drainage had been tested by the winter rains. The test was a somewhat severe one, and after a careful inspection that the committee made on 17th March last, the system was found to be working very satisfactorily, and Sir Philip S. Stott, Bart., F.S.A. who has generously defrayed the whole cost of the actual drainage, expressed himself as being entirely satisfied with the work. Such being the case the committee instructed Messrs Bridgeman, of Lichfield, to proceed with the cleaning of the monument to Ralph Sheldon (died 1546), which was completed under the superintendence of our architect, Mr Philip B. Chatwin, F.S.A. Thus all the four monuments have been cleaned and repaired, but no re-tincturing has been attempted upon any of them.

“The interior walls of the chapel have been re-coloured, and this has included the removal of the very unsightly borders of black paint which surrounded the Sheldon tablets, and which had been placed there in comparatively recent times.

“The committee met finally at Beoley Church on Thursday in last week, when the chair was taken by Dr John Humphreys, F.S.A. (vice-chairman), who referred to the great loss the committee had sustained by the death of their Chairman, the Earl of Plymouth.

“The balance sheet was presented and showed the work has been accomplished at an expenditure of £274 17s. 2d., this sum being exactly balanced by the 174 donations received by the treasurers. The balance sheet, which had been audited by the Vice-Chairman, was adopted, and the trea-

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surers undertook to communicate this brief report to every subscriber to the fund.

“All the documents connected with the fund have been placed with the parochial records preserved in Beoley Church.

“After the meeting a Service of Thanksgiving was held in the Sheldon Chapel, conducted by the Rev. H. Sleigh (Vicar), assisted by the Rural Dean of Bromsgrove (the Rev. F. G. Ellerton, M.A.), who gave an address based on the text, Eccl. xlv. 1, ‘Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us’

“In conclusion it should be noted that the oolite block of stone carved with a figure, which tradition claims as representing an Abbot of Pershore, has at the same time been removed, and placed inside the church in the south-east wall of the nave. This stone was formerly outside the church, set in the south-west wall, and was weathering badly from long-continued exposure.

JOHN HUMPHREYS,

Vice-Chairman.

E. A. B. BARNARD,

REES PRICE,

*Hon. Secretaries
and Treasurers.*

16th July, 1923.”

PART II

*THE SHELDONS OF
BROADWAY*

Chapter I

BALDWIN SHELDON (d. 1548) AND HIS DESCENDANTS

THE founder of the Broadway branch* was Baldwin—Habington's "Baldwin Sheldon of Broadwaye"—second son of Ralph Sheldon (d. 1546), of Beoley and Abberton, who as already shown had married Philippa, the daughter and co-heiress of Baldwin Heath. There is no evidence as to the date of Baldwin Sheldon's birth. He was of the West End, Broadway, in which village his father, who had been one of the Abbot of Pershore's most important tenants, had purchased considerable monastic property,† and where Baldwin Sheldon had a manor-house of which a part is now the barn of West End farm. He married Jane—some authorities give her as Anne—Wheeler, of the Wheelers of Droitwich, and died on 5 July, 1548,‡ as evidenced in the Broadway registers, leaving his widow with the heavy responsibility, which she was soon to share again, of a young family of three sons and six daughters.

The Sheldons, therefore, were now well established at Broadway, and they together with the Savages and

* For pedigree of Sheldon of Broadway, *cf.* Nash, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 145.

† V.C.H. *Worcs.* Vol. iv, pp. 38-9.

‡ Will. P.C.C. 23 Populwell.

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their near neighbours at Snowhill, the Sambaches, now more or less beneficently and for many succeeding years dominated the immediate district, which from before Domesday had been accustomed to the jurisdiction of the Abbots of Pershore.

It is also of interest to note that Baldwin Sheldon held the rectory of Stanton, near Broadway, during the last two years of his life. The evidence,* translated, is thus:

...Baldwin Sheldon (of Broadway) gentleman holds by indenture dated 13 July 38 Henry VIII (1546), made to him by Princess Katherine† late Queen of England, by the advice of her Council all that rectory of Stanton in co: Gloucester, with all tithes and appurtenances belonging to the aforesaid rectory. To have to him from the feast of S^t Michael the Archangel last past, till the end of the term of 21 years, then next following, paying therefor yearly at the usual terms £8, with a clause of re-entry if the rent should happen to be in arrears for the space of two months. Total £8.

Jane Sheldon appears to have married twice after Baldwin's decease, firstly to John Combe‡ of Stratford-upon-Avon, and secondly to Thomas Lewknor, of Alvechurch. This is evidenced in the parish registers of South Littleton, a few miles from Broadway, in which there is this entry: "1554.—The xxij day of November the fyrst yere of the Reygn of our sov'aygn lorde phyllipe owr Kynge & the seconde yere of marye our

* P.R.O., K.R. Misc. Books, Vol. 39, p. 156.

† Cf. Barnard, *Stanton and Snowhill*, pp. 2, 3, 4.

‡ Family of Combe or Combes, cf. Barnard, *New Links with Shakespeare*, pp. 11, 100.

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quene Matrimony was solempnizate openly in the face of the Church Betweyne thomas lewknor gentylmā of the paryssh of Alchurche and Jane Coomes wyddow gentylwomā of the paryssh of brodwey for they had a lycins to be weddyd wyth owt any askyng in the churche of any lawfull prest & were they wold. Bawdon Sheldon was her fyrst husbande dwellyng in brodwey (after hym John a Coomes of Stredford).”

Further to digress, it may be noted that there was one child of the marriage between Jane Sheldon and John Combe. This was a son, William. The Combes were an important family at Stratford-upon-Avon at the end of the 16th and the early part of the 17th centuries, and were intimately associated with William Shakespeare. It is somewhat difficult to determine the relationship of the various members of this family, but this William Combe can be fairly identified with the William who had acquired the important estate of Alvechurch Park, co. Worcester, and much property in the town of Warwick. He seems to have been three times married and on the last occasion (after 1596) to Jane, widow of Sir John Puckering, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal. There was no issue of the marriages. William Combe was admitted to the Inner Temple in 1571, was M.P. for Droitwich in 1588, for Warwick in 1593, and for the County of Warwick in 1598—also High Sheriff for that county in 1608.

It is said he was held in high esteem in the town of Warwick, and this is endorsed by the affection of his relatives in Broadway. He seems to have died in 1610,

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and by his will, the poor of Broadway benefitted by the sum of £10, which was invested later in land, purchased in the open and commonable fields. To William Sheldon,* the elder, of Broadway, he left £20.

Another early and important Sheldon connection with Broadway was that of Anne, the eldest daughter of William Sheldon (d. 1570) of Beoley. She married Francis Savage, of Elmley Castle, a few miles from Broadway, by whom she had several children, and some years after his death became the wife of Anthony Daston, of Dumbleton, owner of Broadway great farm, which she eventually left between her two sons, Walter and Anthony Savage.

Anthony Daston died in 1572—his brass† is still to be seen in the old Church of St Eadburgha, Broadway—and Habington records: “Under this a playne stone with a Cros gradated layd over him and his wydowe, the most bountifull gentellwoman for hospitality of her degree in England, Mistris Daston of Broadwaye.” Anne Daston had died on 25 October, 1619, and was buried the next day. Assuming that she was married at the age of eighteen, this would place her birth *c.* 1528, and would give her a life of about ninety-one years—a marvellous span for the stirring times in which she lived—with a widowhood of forty-seven years spent at Broadway.‡

* He was the grandson of Baldwin Sheldon, and died in 1653 (*v.* p. 104).

† *Trans. Worcs. Arch. Soc.* Vol. III, pp. 123–6.

‡ Barnard, “The Savages of Broadway”, *Trans. Worcs. Arch. Soc.* Vol. X, pp. 43–57.



WESTON IN 1772
(From "*The Antiquarian Repertory*", 1780)



BROADWAY COURT GATEHOUSE IN 1820
(From a drawing in the *Prattinton Collections*)

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Close to the old church, in its perfect setting and guarded by great elms, is the gatehouse to Broadway Court, to which modern additions have been made. It is a Cotswold-stone building, of probably the late 16th century, above a square label over the east archway of which are the quartered arms of Sheldon, Sheldon quartering Ruding and Willington, and below the label are the crests of Savage, Sheldon, and Daston. The shield of Daston quartering Dumbleton, which is built into the modern west front, was found near the site of the old house, of which all material evidences have now entirely disappeared.

Baldwin Sheldon's eldest son, Anthony, appears also to have married a Lewknor, their eldest son being christened William. In 1583-4 this William Sheldon succeeded, on the death of his father, to the extensive lease of the Broadway Manor lands which had been granted to his great-grandfather in 1538 for 80 years, and thus had 30 years to run.

He married Cicely, daughter of Francis Brace, of Doverdale, near Droitwich, by whom he had five sons and eight daughters, a further complication of Sheldons. His wife died in August, 1613, and was buried at Broadway, but her husband's burial is not recorded in the Broadway registers. Their youngest daughter, Anne, had been born in March, 1602-3, and Habington records that there, "in the middle Alley" of the church of St Eadburgha, she placed to her parents' memory "a stone...inlayde with bras wheareon between a gentellman and gentellwoman", were inscribed these

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lines, which together figuratively made an "Altar stone" upon a "pillar", the whole supported by a "pedestal" thus:

To the eternised memory of William
Sheldon Esquyre & Cicely his wife, Anne Sheldon
theyre youngest daughter dothe dedicate this her Altar.
Vppon my Altar stone must lye your birthe's eternall memory
from esquyres both discended greate & good ye are com-
mended.

This pillar telles
What most excells
Your virtuous lyfe
Your hate of stryfe
Your Loyaltie
Your Piety
Your love to friendes
Your pious endes
Your grace's store
Your praise thearefore

My pedestal must graced bee with your deathes' sad
memorye.

Such was your birth your lyfe your happy death
Patern to all that drawe this lyfe's short breath.

It is of relevant interest that two of the six bells* now in the tower of the old church bear the name of this William Sheldon, one inscription being dated 1603, and the other 1609. In both instances the name of Walter Savage is associated with them. Sheldon and Savage, who are both also described as esquires, must have been the donors of the two bells, for they were definitely not the contemporary churchwardens.

* H. B. Walters, "Church Bells of Worcestershire", *Trans. Worcs. Arch. Soc.* Vol. II, p. 51.

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William Sheldon, despite his daughter's eulogium, must have been a man of aggressive nature and tenacious of what he considered were the rights of the Lord of the Manor, for in the years 1609 and 1610, at least, he found himself involved in two disputes,* one with people on his own manor at Broadway concerning the hill pastures there, and the other with the villagers of the neighbouring parish of Childswickham, co. Gloucester, the trouble in this case arising over some pools or fishponds which Sheldon had caused to be made there.

This memorial of William and Cicely Sheldon, and also the recorded memorials of Margery Harewell—wife of Robert Harewell, of Evesham—and Jane Sheldon, their daughters, have disappeared; possibly they remained in the church until 1866, when all the gravestones were removed from the floor of the nave and were replaced by red quarries.

Incidentally it may be noted that Jane Sheldon, in her will† made shortly before her death on 15 February, 1618–19, bequeathed “towards mouldyng, repayringe and beutifyinge of the Chapple in the Nether end of Brodwaye. 50s.”, and “to the repayringe and pitch of the Church waye leading along the westend, from my brother Sheldon's Manor house towards the Church, 50s.”

The son and heir, also named William, of William and Cicely Sheldon, married Ann, daughter of Walter

* Barnard, *Trouble at Childswickham in 1610*.

† *Worcester Wills* (Index Library), 1618, No. 145.

WILLIAM SHELDON (d. 1653)

Savage, of Broadway, and in the later years of his father's life managed his estate there, and lived in the manor-house. His father, soon after his wife's death, went to spend his declining years at Haselor, a small and sequestered village near Great Alne, co. Warwick.

William and Ann Sheldon had a family of at least six sons and three daughters. Their eldest son was christened William, the traditional name, on 10 September, 1609, as recorded in the Broadway registers; and of the other sons, Sherington became a distinguished Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, and Anthony, born in 1613, gave his life for the King's cause, to which his father was so devoted, at the second Battle of Newbury in 1644. Nash,* in his pedigree of the Sheldons of Beoley, states in error that it was Anthony, the nephew of this Anthony, who fell at Newbury. He had, however, died in infancy, as is also testified by the registers.

* *Op. cit.* Vol. 1, facing p. 64. Mrs Warriner, of Weston Park, possesses a very full Sheldon pedigree made by Ralph Bigland in 1808, but obviously with very little reference to the Broadway registers.

Chapter II

CAPTAIN WILLIAM SHELDON, 1609–1680

THE aforementioned William Sheldon succeeded to his father's Broadway estates in June, 1653, when forty-four years of age. His four marriages were with:

(i) Philippa, only daughter of Sir Richard Tracy of Stanway, co. Gloucester, about the year 1632. The marriage took place without the consent of the father, who "withdrew his fatherly love and affection towards his daughter". Reconciliation took place in 1637, and on 17 June Sir Richard made a will devising £1500 to the grand-daughters and £120 a year until the capital sum could be paid over.

Four children were born of this marriage, one son and three daughters. Anna, the first daughter, was baptized at St Eadburgha's Church, Broadway, as recorded in the parish register: "1633–34. Anna daughter of William Sheldon junior and Phillipa his wife being the sole daughter of Sir Richard Tracey, Knt., of Stanway, was baptized on the 18th February, being Shrove Tuesday."

There is no record of the baptisms of the other children. Philippa Sheldon died in 1640.

(ii) Mary *née* Brett, widow of Spencer Lucy, of Charlecote, co. Warwick, whom he must have married before 1650. She died in January, 1660–1, having had three sons and four daughters.

CAPTAIN WILLIAM SHELDON,

(iii) Mary *née* Burst, widow of Sir Robert Stareshmore. She died in 1670. There seems to have been no issue by this marriage.

(iv) Mary, widow of Richard Loveyn. This marriage probably took place in 1671, and by it there were two sons and two daughters.

Thus this much-married Captain Sheldon would seem altogether to have had a family of fifteen children, but the existing evidences are somewhat conflicting on this point.

He, also, was very loyal in his support of King Charles, and appears to have been rather actively engaged therein in the first period of the Great Civil War. He probably met the King when he stayed "at Mr Savage his howse" at Broadway for the night of Sunday, 16 June, 1644; and Charles was again at Broadway less than a year afterwards when in the evening of 10 May, 1645, he went down by Broadway to Evesham, with Prince Rupert marching in the rear-guard, over Broadway Hill, "by the light of Cambden [Chipping Campden] House, which they say was then on fire".*

Later on, in April, 1649, at which time the royal cause was in a desperate state, the cases of Sheldon and his father came before the Cromwellian Committee for Compounding—the principle of compounding with delinquents—when Captain Sheldon deposed: "That he is not worth twoe hundred pounds in reall and p'sonall estate in all the world. And that he had never

* *The Weekly Account*, 12 May, 1645.

1609-1680

had a Commission or was in any Command in armes against the P'liament. And that it is full foure yeares now past since he came in to the P'liament quarters and conformed to the ordinances of Parliament."

This deposition was accompanied by a "true particular" of all his real and personal estate at Broadway, now already and for various reasons but a shadow of the former Sheldon possessions there.

He was again before the Committee on 28 June, 1649, when "as for his delinquency he saith he was never sequestered nor judicially impeached for any delinquency nor was engaged in the latter Warr, But doubting he might be lyable hereafter to Sequestracon for something by him said or done in relason to the former Warr, hath in observance of the late vote of p'liament of the 21th of March 1648 peticoned to Compound and prayes the benefitt of the said vote".*

The vote in question was "That Papists in Arms might compound at a Moiety of their Estates", and therefore Sheldon was treated as a Roman Catholic, although there is not the least evidence to that effect in any other documentary evidences concerning him.

Broadway, up to the siege and fall of Worcester in July, 1646, for a period of some four years and especially for so long as King Charles made Oxford his headquarters, was in the zone of the marching,

* P.R.O., Committee for Compounding, *Interregnum*, Vol. 215, f. 9, followed (ff. 13, 14) by particulars of all his real and personal estate at Broadway and Childswickham.

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counter-marching, and skirmishing over the Cotswold Hills of the Royalist and Parliamentary Forces. From that time onwards until after the Restoration it would seem that Sheldon must have been living quietly at home, and there is no evidence that either he or any member of the Savage family took any part in the Royalist Broadway Plot* in 1647, although it must have been difficult for them to have kept out of it.

At the end of 1646, the close of the period of "the former Warr", the Worcestershire Royalists were for the time crushed. "Such of those who openly favoured Charles and were in Worcester at the surrender had given their parole not to make war against the Parliament, so could not in honour, even if they would, have been willing to run the risk of fines, forfeitures, and sequestrations, breaking their bond. The list given . . . of those in Worcester at the surrender, and the fact that a number of others had compounded but had not yet paid the whole of their composition, and were seeking to get it reduced, would tend to keep them quiet."†

Presumably Sheldon was not in Worcester when it was surrendered to Colonel Rainsborough by Colonel Henry Washington, and that he had acted cautiously in the interval between that time and the beginning of "the latter Warr" some four years later, despite his statement made—as will later appear—in August, 1671.

* Barnard, *The Broadway Plot in 1647*.

† Willis Bund, *The Civil War in Worcestershire*, p. 196.

1609-1680

There is no evidence as to whether or not the William Sheldon who, as a Justice of the Peace, definitely supported a humble petition "of the Nobility, Gentry, Clergy, Freeholders and others your Majesty's most loyal subjects in the County of Worcester" to King Charles, on 6 December, 1644, was of Beoley or of Broadway, but he was certainly of one or the other, and the petition contained the following striking passage:*

With this protestation to the world that with the expense of our lives and fortunes we will continue still in the maintenance of the protestant religion as it hath been established and practised in the time of Queen Elizabeth and King James of blessed memory against all seditious and factious innovations, as also in defence of your Majesty's person, undoubted rights and prerogatives of your Crown, the just privileges of Parliament, the maintenance of the known laws of the kingdom and the liberty and property of the subject; and to the better effecting of the said our loyal intentions for your Majesty's service and our own safety, we humbly desire your Majesty that we may put ourselves under commanders of our own choosing into such a condition of defence, as our country may be able to resist invasions....

Sixteen years later, on 14 May, 1660, William Sheldon of Broadway appears as a supporter of "a declaration of the nobility and gentry of the County of Worcester adhering to the late King" presented to the then all-powerful General Monk by Lord Windsor, Sir John Pakington, M^r Finch and M^r Thomas Hornihold, "for the vindication of themselves from

* *Diary of Henry Townshend of Elmley Lovett, 1640-63*, Pt. II, pp. 183-4.

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those scandalous aspersions as [being] full of recusancy for the great losses since the last wars, declaring they neither do nor will harbour any such thought of Ransom or Revenge against them or any other person, but willing to lay aside all animosity and return to all mutual Christian love, etc.... This declaration was well received by the General, and thanks to the gentlemen which presented it as coming opportunely in respect that the County is in report to be the most malignant through the nation.”*

Shortly afterwards, on 10 July, 1660, “W^m Sheldon of Broadway, Esq^{re}” is named as one of “the Justices of the peace which are in the first Commission of the peace sent down to sit at the Quarter Sessions July 10th, 1660 in the restoration of Charles the second”.

That same year Sheldon’s name appears in the list of suggested Knights of the Royal Oak which, as already shown, Charles II never actually succeeded in establishing as an Order.† Therein he is described as being of Broadway, and as now having an estate of £600 per annum, a very good income in the money-value of that period. It may have suited Sheldon, or the authorities, to make this statement, but a careful computation shows that, at least in his Broadway days, he could never have been worth more than about £175 per annum.

* *Diary of Henry Townshend of Elmley Lovett, 1640-63*, Pt. I, pp. 37-8 (Worcs. Hist. Soc.).

† Grazebrook, *The Heraldry of Worcestershire*, Vol. II, p. 717. Under Warwickshire is “—Sheldon of Beoley, esq.”, the annual value of whose estate is stated to be £2000.

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Soon after the Restoration, probably in the year 1663, Captain William Sheldon appears in the Muster Books for Worcestershire as being in command of “The Clergie Band”, which then consisted of forty-three officers and men, the clergy being rated to provide horse or infantry according to their means and position. A few years later the number was much increased.

It was also about this time that Sheldon had the great honour of being made one of the Band of Gentlemen Pensioners, or Gentlemen-at-Arms of later days—the oldest corps in England, with the exception of the Yeomen of the Guard. This Band had been instituted by Henry VIII in 1509, and was originally composed of gentlemen of noble blood, whom he named his pensioners or spears.

The Captain evidently had a friend at Court for in 1664, or possibly late in 1663, he was appointed Deputy Governor of Guernsey. So, as it appears in the Treasury Books, on 12 November, 1664, M^r Kirke, Paymaster of the Band, is sent a money warrant for £200, “as so much due to William Sheldon as one of the Gentlemen Pensioners who is now employed as Deputy Governor of Guernsey; he, being now with some forces, immediately to transport himself thither”. A few days later there is a note from “Treasurer Southampton to the Auditor of the Receipt to have money in readiness in order to the despatch of Mr Sheldon to Guernsey, including £480 for the raising and conducting of his men”.

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Two days afterwards: "Money warrant for £371. 14/. to Capt. Wm. Sheldon, Deputy Governor of Guernsey, for 3 months pay of a foot company under his command in that island to date from its first muster; and £100 for raising and transporting the said company; the above sums, together with £200 owing to the said Wm. Sheldon for two years as one of the Gentlemen Pensioners to be paid out of the chimney money*".

On 23 November a warrant† was delivered to the Ordnance Commissioners to deliver 70 Muskets and bandoleers, 30 pikes, 100 swords, 1 drum, and 2 halberts to Captain William Sheldon for the use of his company in Guernsey.

On 1 March, 1664-5: "Warrant from Treasurer Southampton to the Auditor of the Receipt to pay £500 to Capt. Sheldon's Company at Guernsey, 'which service being instant and pressing cannot admit the time for the obteyning of a Privy Seal'. And 'I will speedily procure a Privy Seal to be passed for the same for the regular and for one authorising the payment thereof and will send in money for supply of what money you take from any assignment if you satisfie it out of any assigned money, which you must doe, there being no other as I suppose'."

In the Hatton Correspondence‡ published by the Camden Society in 1878, there is a letter which may serve as a preface to those which here follow. It is

* Or Hearth Tax.

† Cal. S.P. Dom. 1664-5, p. 86.

‡ Vol. 1, p. 43 (N.S. 22).

1609--1680

written by Sir Charles Lyttelton*—of the Worcestershire family—to Christopher Hatton, first Baron Hatton, who had been appointed Governor of Guernsey in May, 1662.

Sir Charles dates his letter from Southampton—"a duller thinge than Guernsey by half", he says—on 10 December, 1664:

Deerest Kytt

By the last post from London I received y'rs of the 24 of No^{br} 1664 and before this I hope you have had severall of mine w'ch lay here windbound w'th y'r servant and hors, & one I writt by him since I came hither. I have bine heere ever since to looke after the regim't, w'ch is a duller thinge than Garnsey by half; and I cannot tell when I am like to be released, but expect by my Coll, or some other of ye officers coming downe very speedily, w'ch will be too late I feare though to doe you any service in w'ht you desire of mee.

For most certainly (I believe) Capt. Sheldon, as I told you, has his commission to be Deputy Gov^r of Garnsey & his company was raised before I came out of towne; but why not marcht this way, as they were designed, and soe to be transported to you, I never enquired before now and cannot yet be resolved. If they are gone any other way, you have heard on them, I presume, ere this.

Because you desire it, I must acquaint you that the common whispers and talk has beene that you have received the pay of y^e souldier at Garnsey for above a 12 month & payd the souldier never a penny; and if this be not true, you will doe very well to say something in justification of y'rselfes. . . .

* He had been appointed Governor of Jamaica in 1662, but had now come home, and on 5 November, 1664, had been made Major of the "maritime" regiment, the precursor of the marine forces. Eventually he was Governor of Harwich and Landguard Fort at the time of the great and indecisive naval engagement with the Dutch, in Southwold Bay, in 1672.

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A few weeks afterwards Lord Hatton was accused of having sold to the French brass guns taken from Castle Cornet, and he was recalled from Guernsey on 10 February, 1664-5, Sir Jonathan Atkyns being appointed to act during the life of this nobleman, whose son, Christopher, had the reversion of the post. Lord Hatton, after spending the last years of his life very recklessly, died in 1670, and Christopher duly succeeded.

It is evident, therefore, that Sheldon had received his commission as Deputy Governor of Guernsey, doubtless through high influence, about December, 1664, and there are many letters, now at the British Museum, written by him during his long term of office, which only closed with his death in 1680.

It is of interest to note, in passing, that that ardent Royalist, Sir Peter Osborne, had, in 1642, held the office of Deputy Governor of Guernsey for over twenty years, residing in Castle Cornet, the fortress guarding St Peter Port. This fortress at that time was separated from the town and island by a strait about half-a-mile wide and difficult of navigation owing to the cross currents; the shore was only dry at ebb spring-tides. Though the island had submitted to Parliament, Sir Peter Osborne refused to do so and rather than yield up this key to the English Channel he endured a siege lasting up to May, 1646, thus, with the garrison, suffering great hardships. At this date Sir Peter was granted permission to retire to St Malo, leaving Sir Baldwin Wake in command as Deputy-Governor, and

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it was not until 19 December, 1651, that Castle Cornet finally surrendered to the Parliamentarians, the Royalists leaving with the full honours of war, “drums beating, ensigns displayed, balls in mouth & match lighted at both ends”. Sir Peter Osborne by this date had retired to his home at Chicksands, co. Bedford, a broken and worn-out old man. There he was devotedly nursed by his daughter, Dorothy Osborne, until his death in 1653.*

His own influence was evidently very considerable too, and that he did not hesitate to make it pay, and to pay well, appears in an account, dated 26 December, 1664, of the “Chardges dispursed for S^r William Cookes† his patent for creating him a Baronet”, for his zeal in support of the royal cause. The total cost was £347. 2s. 8d., and by far the largest item was a gift of £160 “paid to Captain Sheldon, of Broadway, Governor [*sic*] of Guernsey, for obtaining the Grant”.‡

The first of Sheldon’s letters is dated 12 September, 1667, from Castle Cornet, Guernsey Island, and endorsed: “M^r W. Sheldon to your Grace from Guernsey”. In the course of this letter,§ to Lord Hatton, Sheldon says that he hopes to have the happiness to come to England in the Spring, but there is no evi-

* v. E. A. Parry’s edition of the *Letters of Dorothy Osborne to Sir William Temple, 1652–4*.

† Of the family of Cookes of Norgrove and Bentley, co. Worcester.

‡ Prattinton, *Commonplace Book*, p. 25.

§ Add. MSS. 29582, f. 430.

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dence that he did so, for there is no further letter until 5 December, 1670,* when he has just heard from Lord Hatton of “the sad news of my deare wife [the third], which is a grieffe beyond expression”.

He continues to his lordship—and, as Guernsey correspondence of this period is rare, and Sheldon rather the soldier of fortune, some of his letters—all of which have been transcribed for the first time during these researches—shall have their due space. Thus, in his own way:

According to yo'r Lo'pps order I shall remove Major Creed into Coll. Lamberts lodgings which is the most Convenient place in the Castle, but I doubt p'ejudiciale enough to yo'r Lo'pps Concerns when you returne, heare is lately A Hollander by extreemity of weather driven in betwixt two Roccks neare Castle de Vale exceedingly spoyled that they that have bought the Hull of her will have much a doe to bring her into the Peere, the vessell struck about 2 or 3 a Clock in the morning which As soone as wee perceived I sent my Serg't with a ffile of Musqueteers to preserve what there was, Whether it bee for the King's interest or the owners, the vessell was bound for Burdex laden with little but ballast only Holland cloth and Cynamon, which has most taken water, but its thought the goods are worth 7 or 800 £ the Country people weare soe violent in breaking the shipp upp with Hatchetts, that if my Serg't had not come in there had beene nothing p'eserved, and it is my opinion that Salvage is due, if it bee not a perfect rack both shipp and goods, and if you please to Advise with Judge Jenkins who my Lord of Canterbury and Sir Joseph Sheldon have good Interest with all, hee will give yo'r Lo'pp much satisfacon, And now my Lord I give yo'r L'pp my humble and harty

* Add. MSS. 21947, f. 147.

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thanks for yo^r greate kindness to mee when you were here,
and that you are pleased to continue mee in yo^r thoughts,
wch I doe assure yo^r Lo'pp I shall on all occasions endeavo^r
to meritt. I beseech yo^r Lo'pp faver mee with my most
humble service to yo^r good Lady And be pleased to beleeve
mee to be with much trueth

Yo^r Lo'pps

Most humble serv't

W. SHELDON.

I have observed yo^r Lo'pps Comaunds in Mustering the
Gunns and Morter's. There is one thing I have omitted
worth yo^r consideracon wch is, that after y^e goods were
unladen there was not any p^{erson} durst stay in y^e vessell att
High water.

This letter is addressed: "For The Right Hono^{ble}
the Lord Hatton att Tennett [Thanet] House in
Aldersgate Streete, London, these w^{ith} speede", and
is sealed, in black wax, with the arms and crest of
Sheldon. The next letter* is dated from Cornet Castle
more than three years later, on 23 December, 1670:

My Lord

I have writt lately to you by Bevis who is now att [South]
Hampton, and I should, had I an opportunity write oftener,
were there anything that might concerne his Ma^{'ties} or
yo^r Lo'pps service worth the imparting to you, wee have
not had any newse from ffrance since you left us, were there
like to bee any thing of accou^t I pr^{'sume} I should have
heard from you before this, the occasion of these hasty lines is
to lett you know, this Bearer being bound for this place from
Plimouth and soe for London, I thought it not a miss to give

* Add. MSS. 29552, f. 465.

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you notice of it and to engage him to waite on you, that if you have any desire to send any thing for the use of the Castell or any of yo'r goods, you might not loose soe good an opportunity seeing they p'esent but seldome. I beleeve you may send by him uppon easey terms, for I understand hee is not certaine of a freight thence I have given you an accompt of a dutch vessell that ran betwixt the Rocks and was p'eserved straingely, but to the greate p'ejudish of the own'rs, for since I writt to yo'r Lo'pp the Master hath sold the vessell for the tenth shee is worth, uppon which I desired Captⁿ Izod,* the goods being brought to the Towne to take an accompt of them & to see them in safe custody until I heare from yo'r Lo'pp, if they bee long to the owners I am sure I have done them good service, I shall trouble yo'r Lo'pp noe further att present only to desire you to p'esent my duty and service to my Lord Arlington with my humble service to yo'r Lady & to beleeve mee to be My Lord

Yo'r Lo'pps most faithfull

humble serv't

WILL. SHELDON.

In other letters† written shortly afterwards Sheldon says of one of them that it is “the furst I ever sent by way of France”, and he sends a copy of it by another vessel, for Dutch privateers were already busy in the Channel.

Later on it appears, from the contemporary correspondence of others in authority in Guernsey, that “the Lieutenant Governor is put in a plunge” because he can get no money with which to pay the troops there, nor is any forthcoming from England. This difficulty

* Doubtless one of the Izods of Stanton, near Broadway.

† These and the references which follow are to be found in Add. MSS. 29553-8.

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about money was, as we know, a common experience in the reign of Charles II as, for instance, Pepys relates in his Diary.

A year passes, and then early in 1670–1 Sheldon asks for leave to come home: “I know yo’r Lo’pp cannot but bee very sensible of my greate loss w’ch makes my concernes in England more than ordinary. I pray you S’r be pleased when you aske for my coming to England to p’esent my most humble duty to his Ma’tie.”

On 12 March, 1670–1, Sheldon reports that he has received “no provisions for our Stoares from yo’r Lo’pp as I beleevd I should have done before this, conceiving it not proper or secure to bee without a handsome p’porcon of Biskitt. I have caused 800 weight to bee made and is to be brought in this day wch if there should bee any sudden or unexpected occasion will by God’s assistance p’event any thing may bee attempted untill you have an opportunity to furnish the Stoares with what is requisite as you intend, wee have had vessells lately both from S^t Malloes & other parts of ffrance, who tell us they heare nothing at all of a Warr....

“...I pray you my Lord be mindfull of mee when you take yo’r leave of his Ma’tie....”

Money continues to be needed for the garrison; and on 23 May, 1671, there is another request for leave, “...the death of my wife and some other relacons being of great concerne to mee”. In July following he

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is home, and in London writing from "the Pall Mall" he says: "...I suppose you have not as yett heard of my Lord Windsor's being a prisoner in the Tower & Sir William Kites [Keyte's] with a Serjant att Armes for carrying a challenge from my Lord Windsor to my Lord Barkely the Lord Lieut of Ireland..."; and a few days later: "Blood & his Companions are att liberty...the King came to towne on Tuesday night last who asked mee how all was att Guernsey...."

Sheldon would be particularly interested in the affairs of those first mentioned in this extract from his letter, as they all had more or less local associations with his Broadway country, and as for Captain Blood, a discarded officer of Oliver Cromwell's former household, his name was already known to most people, for his almost successful attempt with confederates to hang the Duke of Ormonde at Tyburn, when he was rescued by his friends, on 6 December, 1670.

A fortnight before Sheldon wrote this letter, Blood had again achieved great notoriety by his attempt, disguised as a clergyman, to steal the royal crown from the Jewel Office in the Tower of London, yet notwithstanding these and other offences he was not only pardoned, but had a pension of £500 per annum settled on him by Charles II before the close of 1671.

In August of that year money for the Guernsey garrison still troubles Sheldon's mind, and he writes now from Broadway concerning this necessity: "...but I hope your Lo'pp will bee more kind & friendly to mee, who hath never disserved you in any thing & have

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served his Ma'ties ffather of blessed memory & my Country from the beginning to the end of that unhappy Rebellion, never to bee forgot, almost to my ruine...". Later in that year he writes from London again complaining of scarcity of money with which to pay his officers and men, and adds that he has sometimes advanced the money himself and has been often left with nothing else but twenty shillings and his credit.

He had been home a long time now, and the garrison at Castle Cornet must have been becoming anxious about it all. However, before February, 1671-2, there was evidently some amelioration, and on the 6th of that month he writes from Broadway:

My Lord,

I have lately rec'd a lett'r from my Ensigne by w'ch I understand you are Pleased to continue y'or greet kindnesse to mee in supplying him in his great necessity for w'ch I give yo'r Lordship my most humble thanks and I assure you my Lord I shall always acknowledge y'r greate favours with a faithfull service both to you & yo'rs. Really I am not a little troubled y^t I am in such a strait as to desire yo'r farther assistance in preserving my reputation till Mr Hatton can returne money; wch I hope hee will doe by those who shall bring this; wee are here troubled how to return money: I wrote to my Ensigne Long Since to send over Bills, for a hundred and fifty pounds....I suppose y'r Lo'pp hath heard before this of ye recruiting of our Companies; and of y^e raising of forces as I am informed to the Number of ten thousand w'ch y^e Duke of Monmouth is to bee Generall of & little Capt. Clerke Major Generall; my Lord Dunbarre & Rich. Thyn, and Fenwick Berkley with several others of y^e Great Gallants are to have Companies of ffoot. I am Preparing to wait on yo'r Lords'p suddenly....

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War with Holland had been threatening for some time past, and shortly before this time Charles II, faced with strong national opposition to his schemes, had plunged hastily into hostilities. An attack on a Dutch convoy was at once followed by a declaration of an unpopular war against Holland by England and France, and fresh supplies of money were obtained for the purposes of the inevitable struggle. This was done by closing the Exchequer, and suspending the payment of either principal or interest on loans advanced to the public Treasury.

It had been immediately necessary to increase the national forces, as Sheldon notes and the adequate defence of a strategically important place like Guernsey was imperative. There is evidence that its fortifications were strengthened and that the long-neglected garrison, now reinforced, was at last receiving some regular pay. Sheldon however remains somewhat mysteriously in London—perhaps he was raising men for the War—and he writes to Lord Hatton, now at Guernsey, on 19 March, 1671-2:

My Lord,

Although I intend by God's p'rmission to waite on you suddenly, yett I cannot but give yo'r Lo'pp greete thanks for yo'r care & kindness to mee in p'cureing twenty men to bee added to my Company, which I shall bring over with mee. This day I understand by yo'r Brother there is now an opportunity to make them up one hundred, and doubts not of it by reason wee are already ingaged in a most sharpe warr which will obleidge yo'r Lo'pp to have a greete care of that important place.

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At last, on 24 June, 1672, he is at Southampton, waiting for a ketch for Guernsey, and writes to Hatton that he hopes to be with him “if the Catch cum and the wind serve this week...”; also: “I am infinitely troubled att the folly of my servant who putt l’re & a box which came from her [Lady Hatton’s] Lady Mother in my truncke and never acquainted mee with it untill the trunck was gone to Guernsey. I have sent the key in a l’re to M^r Covert....”

Sheldon at length reached Guernsey, but early in September he was back again at Pall Mall, and writes giving Lord Hatton the latest news concerning the movements of the English and Dutch fleets, and “to lett you know of our safe arrivall though in a Storme”. Ten days later he is dining “att my Lord of Canterbury’s”, by whom he evidently means the Archbishop of Canterbury, Gilbert Sheldon—the founder of the Sheldonian Theatre at Oxford—who did not bear any relationship to him, and who ruled as Archbishop from 1663 until his death in 1677. In the course of this letter Sheldon notes that his fellow-guest was Sir Joseph Williamson, the statesman and diplomatist; and further refers to “the present great losses to this country caused by the enemy’s privateers”.

It would appear from his further correspondence that Sheldon was now quartered at Southampton for some eighteen months. He was therefore fortunate in not being involved in the disaster which befel Castle Cornet on Sunday night, 29 December, 1672, when during a violent thunderstorm it was struck by lightning,

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and the powder magazine exploded. The castle, as already said, stood before the town and harbour of St Peter Port, about half-a-mile from the shore, then of considerable strategic importance.

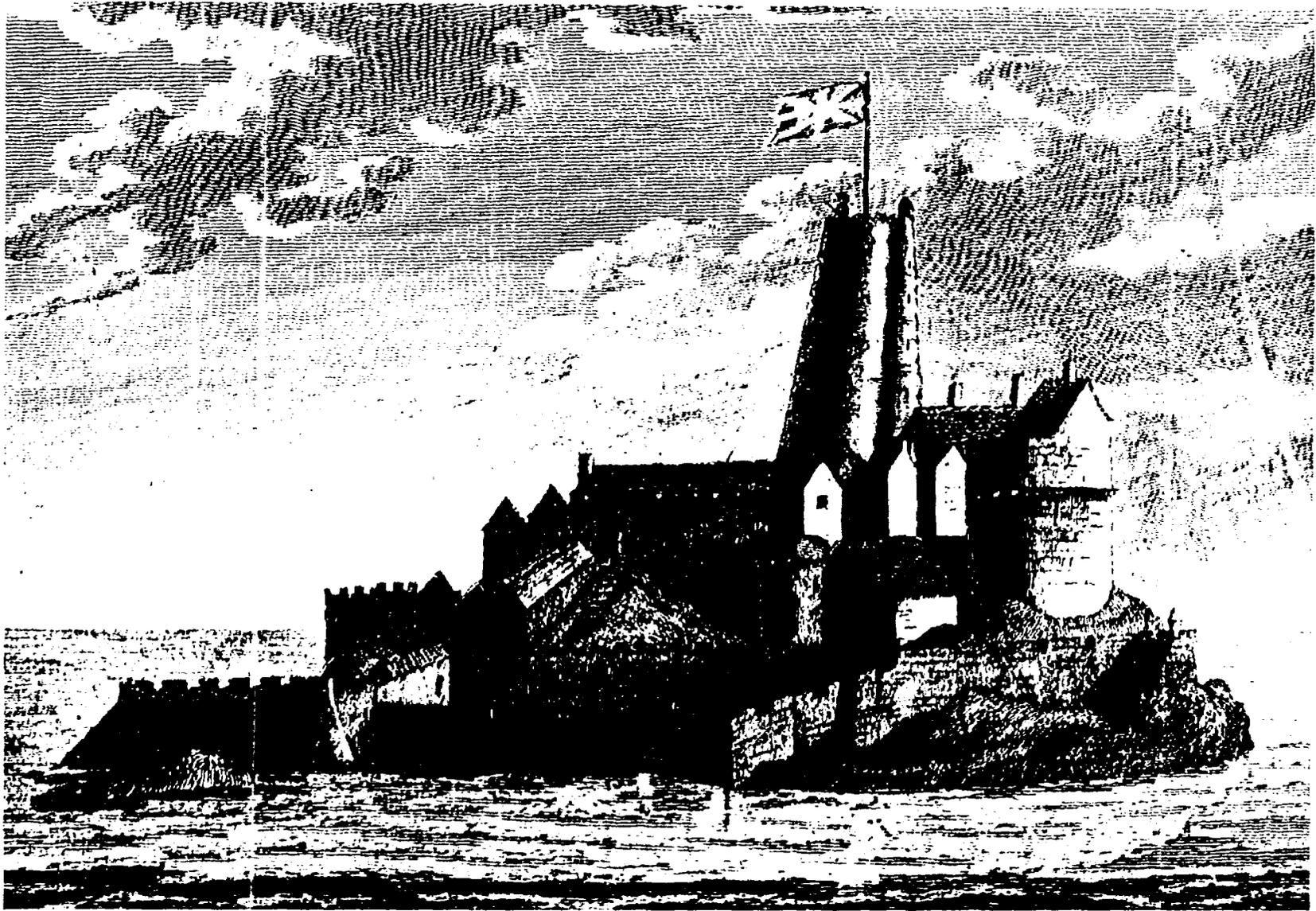
The new Governor had made several additions to the castle, and these and others were destroyed. By the fall of the ceiling of one of these new buildings the Dowager Lady Hatton was killed, and also Lady Hatton, daughter of the Earl of Thanet and wife of the Governor, and several servants. Lord Hatton who was in another part of the castle escaped unhurt, but had a marvellous escape, having been blown in his bed on to the battlements. Two of his children who were also in the castle were uninjured.*

Accounts of this disaster apparently did not reach Southampton until some three weeks later and, on 18 January, 1672-3, Sheldon at once writes to condole, in a very few words, with Lord Hatton upon the tragic death of his wife.

Throughout 1673 there are letters from Southampton—"Southton" or "Hampton" is his usual style—to Lord Hatton giving him the latest news. In one of them Sheldon says: "I came but y^e last night out of Worcestershire"—evidently he had paid one of his brief visits to Broadway—and in another that "the Channell is full of Privateers".

In May, 1674, he is back again at Guernsey, still "this place of soe great concerne", and in July he once

* Duncan, *History of Guernsey*; Jacob, *Annals of the Bailiwick of Guernsey*.



CASTLE CORNET, GUERNSEY, BEFORE THE EXPLOSION IN 1672
(From "*The Antiquarian Repertory*", 1806-10)

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more is in need of money for his company of soldiers, but none comes, and late in August he writes seriously, although to us there is humour in it, that "... having acquainted you allready with my condition here for want of Mony & if not Speedily Supplied I must be forced to putt my company upon the parish which yo'r Lordship knows will not be pleasing to any here...".

In November of that year Mary Sheldon, his fourth wife, had the courage to leave Broadway for the time being and to adventure joining her husband, which she succeeded in doing, but not before he had sent one Beavis—had perhaps chartered him and his ketch—"to Hampton to ffetch my Wife there being noe Vessell there to bringe her heather".

Many letters continue to be written from Guernsey, until 1678 when Sheldon is also in Southampton and London. In October, 1676, Mary Sheldon had asked "for a Lycence for one hundred todds of woll", in a letter which displays her very limited education, even for those days. This wool was presumably to be sent out to Guernsey, probably to help in supplying the garrison with extra garments now that the winter was approaching, and later on it is from there—"from Garnzey" she says—that she writes to thank the authorities for the licence granted to her.

In August, 1678, Sheldon and his wife were back again at Broadway, and he writes to Lord Hatton thus:

My Lord

I hope your Lordshipp will Pardon me of haueing not writt oftener to you. I assure your Lordshipp it was not for want

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of a real Serviuce, all things have been upon such Uncertainties that I could not woll tell what to writt but Mr Hatton beinge in London I referred wholely to him, but his beinge now in Northamtonsheire causeth me to give you the trouble of thes Lines, the Latest Newes is his Ma'tie hath ordered Proclamation to be given out for the Parlament to Meett the nine and twenth inst. the Ducke of Munmuth is gone for fflanders with some Rogemonts of horse and dragunes and it is Reported that the Ducke of Yorke is to go over Ganarallissimo Notwithstandinge all this wee have one day newes of Peace and another of Warre When there is a Cartenty of Warr though my orations weare never soe urgant heare I will not ffaile to waite on your Lordshipp by the first who am My Lord

Your Lorshipp's most ffaithfull humble
Saruant

WILL. SHELDON.

Then, on 28 October, there follows a letter, also written from Broadway. Sheldon has lately heard of the "Popish Plot", and of the depositions of the contemptible Titus Oates. He evidently has believed it all, but he writes as being at least no Papist now, whatever he may have been before 1649. He says:

My Lord

I have writt severall times to yo'r Lordshipp but having not the Honour of recevyng a Line from you makes me dought they have Miscarried and these are onely to present my seruis to y'r Lordshipp and to Let you know ye newes we have latly hard from London is that thare is A great plott Discovered against his Majesties parson and the prodistant Religion by some papists many of them are clapt in Newgate and as we heare ye parliment was to sitt on Munday last and ye prisoners to be tried on thursday I heare Mr Hatton hath

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binn Ill and kept his Chamb'r tenn dayes but is now on recovery I intend to goe to London sudingly If yo'r Lordshipp hath Aney seruis to Command me thare I shall very gladly observe yo'r Commands for I am My Lord

Yo'r Lordshipp's
Most Humble Seruant
WILL. SHELDON.

These last two letters are both addressed “ffor the Right Honorab'le Christopher Lord Hatton Baron of Korbey* Cap'tan & Govenor of his Majesties Castle & Island of Guarnzey”, and are sealed with the Sheldon arms.

There are other letters from Guernsey in 1679; and in the Treasury Books, under 23 July in that year, is a note: “£222. 19. 11 to William Sheldon, Lieut. Gov. of Guernsey, by him disbursed for the quarters of several of his soldiers in the garrison of Guernsey”.

There is a final reference to Sheldon, in the Treasury Books, † under 30 October, 1679, which suggests that he may have been making some addition to his small means by his interest in the trade in salt:

Henry Gay to the Attorney General forwarding papers as follows, relating to illegal importation of salt from Guernsey. The Treasury Lords, to whom said are referred by the Privy Council, desire your opinion what legal course may be advisable for redressing these abuses.

Appending a letter from John Clement, a Customs officer, dated Weymouth, 1679, Sep. 3, to the Customs Commissioners: “I have enquired what quantity of salt has been usually made upon the island of Guernsey, & find that for many years past there has not been made above 10 or 15

* Actually Kirby, co. Northampton. † Vol. vi, p. 239.

CAPTAIN WILLIAM SHELDON,

tons in a year, and very often none at all. Yet into this port here (Weymouth) hath been lately brought 28 tons as the product of the island, and at Lyme and Poole twice that quantity to each place. So the case is very plain that French salt is brought into Guernsey, & by the act of the Deputy Governor, Capt. Sheldon, and his licence to back it, it becomes the product of that island, & so must be received here by virtue of their charter. If this is not prevented in time, these Western ports will be as well furnished with French salt as ever it was before the prohibition of this commodity. For here hath very lately gone from hence to Guernsey two or three barques to load salt either for this or some other of these Western ports. Send me your directions concerning the said salt.”

Returning to the letters, the series closes rather pathetically with yet one more appeal from Sheldon to the Treasury, on 25 November, 1680, for money needed for his men—“for really my Lord without it I am not in a condicon to Cleare with my Company* as I ought to doe: This w’th my Harty prayers for a happy union Beetwixt the King and P’liament...”, in the matter of the Exclusion Bill.

A few weeks later, “about Christmas, 1680”, so his widow deposed, Sheldon, seventy-one years old, was dead and buried in Guernsey which, with its people, must all have been so familiar to him. He had been there more or less for some sixteen years, and it must

* It is of present interest to note that the withdrawal of the Regular Army Garrison from the Channel Islands was completed on 24 November, 1930, by the return to Aldershot, of the 2nd Battalion The Queen’s Own Royal West Kent Regiment from Guernsey. There had been Regular garrisons from the establishment of the British Army in the Islands since the 17th century.

1609-1680

have seemed far away, and difficult to reach, from the Broadway of his earlier days where the Sheldons, plenteous as they had been, were soon destined to become but a name.

Captain Sheldon appears actually to have always lived in a more or less impecunious state, and it is not surprising therefore that his affairs were found to be very involved when their final settlement became necessary. He had, it seems, made a will which was contained in the papers of the legal proceedings necessary on the sale of the manor to Sir Francis Winnington in 1683. There is no will, however, in the records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, but there is a record dated Feb. 1679-80 in the Book of Administrations at Somerset House.

The inevitable lawsuit came, into the legal details of which it is not necessary to go. Poor Mistress Sheldon, the widow, was of course the defendant, and her depositions show that the Captain's funeral expenses, and a tombstone not now traceable, cost her, £108. 5s., this amount including an item of £29. 6s. "for the cloth for the funeral".

A true and perfect inventory of all and singular his goods, chattels, and credits is in the file of relevant Chancery Proceedings* now preserved at the Public Record Office. In this file are also the aforementioned depositions of Mistress Sheldon and others. The inventory was made and the goods appraised on 17 January, 1680-1. It is a long document of which full

* Bridges before 1714, 92/87.

CAPTAIN WILLIAM SHELDON,

particulars have already been printed,* but perhaps it is well that the Guernsey section—"the goods and chattels...that came from Garnsey"—should be detailed here, incidentally to afford some idea of the Captain's equipment when stationed at Guernsey Castle, and as Deputy Governor of that island.

It appears that he had there possessed:

	li.	s.	d.
One Small Silver Cup three silver Spoons			
one Silver Seale	01:	10:	0
One Gold Seale	01:	0:	0
Three dozen of Peuter plates	01:	4:	0
Seaven Peuter dishes	01:	8:	0
Two pair of Candlesticks	00:	3:	0
A Case and four Knifes	00:	1:	4
One watch with a Silver Case	03:	0:	0
One Small lookeing glasse	00:	2:	6
Two Skillets and one old Kettle	00:	9:	0
Two Cusions	00:	2:	6
Three dozen of old Diaper Napkins five old Table cloaths five pair of Sheets two Pillowbears [pillow cases]	02:	6:	0
One Old Hatt	00:	5:	0
Three old Trunks	00:	6:	0
One Scarfe and Belt	03:	10:	0
One old Sword and Belt	00:	10:	0
One old ffeather Bed and Bolster and Three Pillowes	03:	0:	0
Two Case of pistolls two musketts two car- bines and a birding-piece	[not priced]		
A Drippin pan and pestell and mortar and two old chairs and other Lumber	01:	10:	0
	20:	07:	4

* Barnard, *A Broadway Inventory of 1680-1.*

1609-1680

In all, the Captain's assets were appraised at £315.5s.4d., whilst his debts amounted to £7199.14s.3d., a truly hopeless position. These debts included a sum of £83. 19s. 9d. for money owing in Guernsey, such as "for beare and other things", £19. 15s. 6d.; for money borrowed, £29. 13s.; and £1. 15s. which he should have paid "for Coffins for the Soldiers, and arrears and other things".

After his death, thus his widow deposes, she as his executrix sold the manor of Broadway and all the other lands, etc. there to Sir Francis Winnington for £5900, "but the debts surmount the purchase-money", which unfortunately for her and her family was only too evident.

There had been a suggestion of fraud, but Mistress Sheldon says that she has disclosed everything, also that she has been at great charges and has been obliged to make four journeys to London already about these affairs.

Why there should really have been all this penury, and how the whole affair closed no one can tell now. These Sheldons seem to have lived with little thought of the morrow, and one of the churchwardens' books (Vol. III) for the parish of Broadway contains sad evidence of their decline, for therein is the record that in 1694 a certain Mary Sheldon was in receipt of parish relief for 40 weeks, and for the whole year of 1695. She died early in 1696, and is described in the register as being the daughter of William Sheldon, esquire, doubtless the Captain.

And so the end.

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