

Biography & Epitaph of Ralph Sheldon c.1537, d.1613

Early Years

Ralph, son of William Sheldon and Mary Willington, was born around 1537, the eldest son and fifth child. His life before his marriage to Anne, daughter of Sir Robert Throckmorton of Coughton Court, in 1557, is shadowy.¹ According to the epitaph, composed by his son, placed above the tomb Ralph built for himself in Beoley church, Worcestershire, he attended Oxford university, travelled abroad 'in France and other parts' and spent some time at the Queen's court.² The records of Oxford University however contain no entry of his matriculation nor is his attendance substantiated by lists of Oriol College.³ Only one, possibly ambiguous, reference suggests he travelled, briefly, abroad; the words of the epitaph led E.A. Barnard to suggest that his companion was Richard Hyckes, later manager of the tapestry venture for which William Sheldon set out provisions in his will.⁴ Ralph's attendance at Court remains undefined, but is at least as probably the court of Queen Elizabeth as of her half-sister Mary, for which Ralph would have been very young indeed. The one fact about his youth that is documented, his attendance at the Middle Temple, which he entered in 1556 and where he should still have been in 1558, was omitted from the tomb inscription and is not mentioned in any biography.⁵



Whatever the truth, one way or another Ralph received the standard education of gentry sons. His marriage into an old-established landed family, staunch Catholics, can only have enhanced his own social standing at least locally. His father's astute gauging of the changing political scene on the accession of Queen Elizabeth (1558) and his second marriage around 1555, to the mother of the sometime wife of Ambrose Dudley, younger brother of Robert, later earl of Leicester, ensured useful political contacts at the highest level. They would have replaced those lost when Nicholas Heath, Ralph's great uncle, was deprived in 1559 of the Chancellorship and of the see of York.⁶ One of Ralph's first tasks was to bring about his own father-in-law's resignation from the post of keeper of Warwick castle and hand the office over to Robert Dudley.⁷ Possibly through the latter's influence Ralph was elected knight of the shire in 1563; certainly he was secure enough in Dudley's favour to be able to call on his influence as Chancellor of Oxford University in 1566 when Ralph sought the lease of the manor of Dean, Oxon., from the Fellows of Oriol College. It was granted to him, reluctantly it would seem, only because of Dudley's intervention.⁸ Little else is known about Ralph's activities for the rest of the decade; he was, presumably, still overshadowed by his father.

His independent, and his public, life began at the age of 33 on the death of his father in December 1570; the will laid down elaborate precautions for the preservation, as for the division, of the estates between the two sons, Ralph and William, and for the portions allotted to the daughters and to Margaret their step-mother.⁹ Licence to enter on his lands was granted on 5 June 1571 and almost immediately thereafter he became involved in the day to day administration of Worcestershire. He served on the commission of musters in 1569 for Worcestershire and, in the same county, on post mortem commissions.¹⁰ In 1573 he was named along with a member of Leicester's household, John Tracy of Toddington, as an arbitrator in an inheritance dispute in a family to which he was related, the Catesbys; the next year

he was ordered by the Privy Council to 'take some paines' to end the controversy between the recusant MP Sir John Conwey and others about common land at Okenheath in the parish of Beoley.¹¹ In 1576 Ralph was pricked as sheriff of Worcester and served on further commissions.¹²

The Complications of Conviction

The question of Ralph's religious beliefs remains unclear. If he was truly a Catholic, it is perhaps curious that he was sent abroad in 1555. There is no reason to think, as is often said, that he converted on his marriage in 1557, when in any case it would have been politic to profess Catholicism; mixed marriages were far from unusual throughout the C16 and at least in the early years of Elizabeth's reign it was unnecessary for any man to reveal his true convictions. It is perfectly possible that, like his father, he never made his position clear. Exactly when he converted is unknown, but his problems as a Catholic began, as they did for so many others, with the coming of Mary Queen of Scots in 1569. They were intensified by the papal bull *Regnans* and later by the arrival of the Jesuit missions. Nevertheless, reference to a Mr Sheldon as an agent of Mary Queen of Scots soon after her arrival in England is almost certainly to a member of another family, possibly that living at Ashbourne, Derbyshire.¹³ His social position was perhaps first put in jeopardy by the earl of Leicester's increasing mistrust of Catholics which assailed him in the early 1580s, a time when the younger generations of county families were increasingly becoming disaffected.¹⁴ In 1579 Sheldon received a letter from one George Williams, who described himself as a priest at Rouen, asking to be told if there were any ships that could transport him to Ireland or to Scotland.

In August 1580 Ralph was summoned to appear before the Privy Council at Oatlands.¹⁵ Alongside him were the Catholic Lords Paget, Compton and Vaux, Sir Thomas Tresham, Sir William Catesby, Sir John Arundel and Sir Thomas Throckmorton. According to Father Persons, a Jesuit priest, Sheldon spent his last night of freedom in Persons' room. By November Ralph was in the Marshalsea prison from which he was removed by his wife on the plea of sickness. He was placed in the care of the Dean of Westminster, Gabriel Goodman, who had been instructed to talk to Sheldon and bring him to the right way of thinking. It seems that by January Sheldon promised 'to yield himself dutiful and to repair to church' The Catholic account records the circumstances of his submission along with Paget's; Sheldon's change of heart is said to have been celebrated in the streets of London with a rhyming couplet 'Sheldon is fallen and do you know why/Through oves and boves and pecora campi'.¹⁶

His decision to conform at least outwardly may well have been dictated by expediency; his attitude appears to have confused his contemporaries. The depth of his conviction must be in doubt, even though the suspicion of recusancy hung over him for the rest of his life, sometimes little more than an insult, sometimes a serious threat to his way of life. In December 1583, caught in the arrests made as part of the Arden plot, a priest, Hugh Hall, confessed that he had said mass at Sheldon's house and had for the past fourteen years been living in turn there and with Sir John Talbot, Sir John Throckmorton and Lord Windsor.¹⁷ Two years later, John Russell of Strensham, husband to Sheldon's eldest daughter Elizabeth, threw the charge of Catholic practices at him and used it against his wife too in an attempt to divorce her.

Unafraid, Ralph answered, in court as he claimed to have done in life, that he was unashamed of his beliefs and thought himself as good a man as any other.¹⁸ Russell's plan to ambush his father in law misfired; only by abusing him as a papist Russell could be certain the authorities would pursue the matter. Nevertheless, he does not seem to have greatly weakened Sheldon's position in the county. Slightly later, in 1587, Thomas Morley, a Worcester clothier, wrote to Sir Francis Walsingham about the Worcestershire election for sheriff; at the same time Ralph was examined before the Grand Jury of Worcestershire on the subject of his religion, possibly in connection with nomination for that office.¹⁹ He was indicted and was not chosen, but he had had powerful supporters, amongst them bishop Whitgift. However, in 1587 he was once again before the Privy Council; payment to the clerk to testify to his appearance is recorded in his personal account book. Yet only between 1587 and 1589 are there any records of payment of fines for recusancy.²⁰ He also complied with the orders that Catholics should supply at their own cost arms and a man, Griffith Jones, for the defence of the realm, at least in his own county; he was less happy to fulfill the obligation on a house at which, he claimed, he was only briefly staying.²¹ He does not, however, seem to have been amongst those kept under surveillance in the months before the Armada.²²

The greatest challenge to Sheldon's loyalty was the claim that he was financing a plot which came to light late in July 1594 when the confessions of Henry Young and Richard Williams revealed that Sheldon was in touch with the Jesuit Cardinal Allen; one of Sheldon's servants, another Williams, left England on pretence of fetching hawks from Ireland to deliver the letter. The Bishop family (of Wolford and Brailes), one of whom was a priest, were also implicated in a robbery at Winchester, the spoil from which was melted down and used by the perpetrators. Their plans seem to have encompassed robbing the Queen's jewels and plate at Whitehall, killing the sovereign and replacing her by the earl of Derby. Sheldon was examined and his house was searched, while Mr Thimbleby 'who was to have married Sheldon's daughter' (presumably the youngest, Philippa), was also captured. The articles for Sheldon's interrogation were devised out of the accusations of Henry Young and others; he was to be asked about his intercourse with English fugitives, what books and libels against the state he had in his hands, what he knew of his late servant Williams to whom he is supposed to have declared that he wished the catholic religion restored, about the priest at his house and the celebration of mass there.²³ Sheldon got off lightly, perhaps because he wrote to the Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas Egerton, who protected him from the charge of non-attendance by claiming that Sheldon had been seen at church in London; his only penalty was to be subjected to further attempts at conversion. Thomas Throckmorton and Charles Paget too were implicated and it was claimed that they had the assistance of the King of Spain in a network of spies and informers which stretched abroad.²⁴

It was not the last of Ralph's brushes with conspiracy. In August 1603, close to the time of the visit of the Spanish ambassador Taxis, bent on making peace, Sir Richard Lewkenor, Chief Justice of Chester, received letters taken by an over-zealous bailiff at Ludlow from Francis Plowden, Sheldon's nephew, which seemed to the Justice, because they were 'somewhat misticall and dark', to indicate another plot. If one existed, nothing is known to have come of it and, without any further problems, permission to travel abroad was given to Plowden and to Sheldon's grandson, William, to travel abroad six months later.²⁵ Curiously, neither Ralph nor any member

of his immediate family were ever mentioned in connection with the Gunpowder Plot of 1605; Jane Tasborough, already Ralph's second wife, however, provided information and it was the distantly related Robert Catesby who conceived the plot.²⁶

Sheldon seems to have been sufficiently well regarded to be considered above disloyalty, despite the fact that he maintained contacts with Catholic circles, some of them incautious. One such contact dogged him for years and may only have been resolved finally by the terms of his will.²⁷ Despite Whitgift's estimate sometime around 1576 that Sheldon's income was £1000 p.a. Sheldon may have been in need of ready cash. Certainly he became entangled with the Catholic Thomas Horde, normally resident in London, who entrapped Sheldon with false promises of future gains into loans over a period of some fourteen years. Each loan was guaranteed by a series of eight recognizances acknowledged to third parties in Chancery for Horde's 'better securitie'; repayment was by rent charges on Sheldon lands. The account book notes outgoings for the paperwork together with receipt and repayment of various sums.²⁸ Horde's aim was to increase his own income and to keep his own fortune and estates hidden. Sheldon also sheltered Horde at Weston for twelve years from 1588/89. Not until 1599 did trouble start when Horde, having long defaulted on his recusancy payments, was finally declared a convicted recusant. A quarrel ensued and it seems that Sheldon ceased repayments, thus giving Horde the chance to declare the recognizances forfeit. Though repayments were agreed by the mediation of friends Horde repudiated the agreement; Sheldon took the case to Chancery. The matter came to the attention of Sir Edward Coke, Attorney-General, who then brought a case against all the participants in the Exchequer Court, arguing that Horde had attempted to defraud the Crown of revenues justly belonging to it and that the recognizances should be forfeit to the Crown. Sheldon was made to pay the monies he had owed Horde to the Crown instead.²⁹ The last official record of the case is the King's order to Sir Robert Cecil to accept the payment of a composition for the settlement of the debt to the Crown; it was almost certainly ignored.³⁰

None of these accusations seems to have dented Sheldon's reputation or resulted in his being regarded as a serious threat to the realm. In 1596 Sir John Harington wrote in the *Apology for Ajax* that 'he heard one that was a great courtier say that he thought Sheldon one of the sufficientest wise men of England and fittest to have been made one of the Council, but for one matter' [his religion].³¹ In 1603 Sheldon offered a gift to Sir Robert Cecil which was, presumably, accepted; Sheldon did not say what it was.³² In the same period Sir Thomas Bodley, through Sheldon's old friend Anthony Blencowe, Provost of Oriel College, Oxford, obtained the services of Sheldon's chainman as the smith who would manufacture the chains to secure the books in Bodley's new library in Oxford.³³ Sheldon's near neighbour, Thomas Habington, described him as a quiet, serious and studious man.³⁴

Artistic Endeavour

And that is the other side of the man. His interests, as also his social contacts, are revealed in tantalizing glimpses through the pages of the account books for 1586-88; he purchased sheet music and virginals, a map and several books. Only one of the recorded titles can be identified, Robert Tanner's *Mirror for Mathematices*. Its purchase substantiates Sheldon's interest in surveying demonstrated by his repair of his 'dyall and glasse' and his expenditure of 40s. on a map, not described, in 1588.³⁵

His wider contacts began with his family alliances and his ‘general knowledge’ reached a high level. His aunt, née Margery Willington, had married as her second husband Sir Ambrose Cave, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, responsible for the series of drawings of Duchy properties made in 1561/2.³⁶ Her daughter married into the family of Sir Francis Knollys, Treasurer of the royal household, patron of the map maker John Blagrave and surveyor of Feckenham Forest, an area in which the Sheldons had land.³⁷ Another of Sheldon’s relatives and near neighbours was Fulke Greville, father of the Fulke Greville who assisted John Speed and whose generosity both Camden and Speed acknowledged in their accounts of Warwickshire.³⁸ The landlords in the parishes adjacent to Weston were the Petres of Ingatestone, into whose family Sheldon would marry his grandson, descendants of Queen Mary’s chancellor and patrons of the mapmaking family the Walkers of Hanningfield.³⁹ William Moulton, lessee of nearby Todenham, was another friend. Sheldon may also have been acquainted with Raphael Holinshed, editor and compiler of a *Chronicle*, steward of the Burdett family who purchased Packwood from Ralph’s father.⁴⁰

Ralph was an indefatigable correspondent, certainly not afraid to beard the powerful and make his views known. Thus he requested the Chancellor of Worcester diocese, William Warmistry, to search records for evidence of his own rights to presentation to the living of Stretton on Fosse;⁴¹ he offered a private explanation of the rights and wrongs of a case concerning his actions at Brailes in advance of its hearing by Sir Julius Caesar, Master of the Court of Requests;⁴² and for Fulke Greville he made purchases in London and attempted to negotiate a lease.⁴³ At a more domestic level he expounded his ideas on the suitable stones to make millstones to his cousin Margaret Knollys, offering his help with this and in the matter of the wardship of Thomas Bracebridge which he shared with her.⁴⁴ He was generous to his friends, offering, for example, to lend the services of his mason, the otherwise unknown Ralph Richmond, to Sir Robert Pytte of Kyre Park Worcestershire,⁴⁵ and generous also to his family, especially to the older generation, keeping in touch with his aunt Philippa Pollard and with his step-mother.⁴⁶ He assisted the family of Ludovic Greville, condemned to death in 1587 who chose to be crushed to death under a stone to protect the inheritance for his young family rather than die as a traitor which would have led to forfeiture of his lands. Sheldon later acted as one of several mortgagees for Robert Catesby at Chastleton.⁴⁷

Ralph was also the builder of the new house at Weston, construction of which began around 1586. Payments were made to quarrymen at Chipping Norton for the stone and other payments were made to two Burford freemasons, Anslett and Little, and to Ralph Richmond; 2000 ‘bordes’ were purchased secondhand from Sir Robert Pytte then rebuilding Kyre Park.⁴⁸ Nothing now remains; the house was demolished c.1826, though an assortment of decorative pieces survive.



Shields in the Wolford fountain, © Hilary L. Turner

A fireplace is now in private ownership and an armorial shield is incorporated, half of it upside down, into the Victorian drinking fountain in Little Wolford.⁴⁹ Sir John Harington commended the house for its hill-top site, though he regarded its plumbing

as sub-standard; nevertheless, it is clearly to be highly rated amongst the new edifices of the period.⁵⁰ The eighteenth-century antiquarian Nichols recorded an otherwise unsubstantiated visit by Queen Elizabeth in 1572 stating that in his own day an apartment was still called the Queen's Chamber and that her coat of arms remained over the door. He too commented on the fine situation, now mapped as Weston Gardens; however, if Elizabeth's visit took place, it must have been to the old house which Ralph replaced.⁵¹

The picture drawn by Henry Beighton in 1716, published in later editions of Dugdale's *Warwickshire*, shows a three-storey house with projecting wings on the façade; not unlike Chastleton it too was built round a courtyard.⁵² Its Long Gallery was said to be 160 feet long and its detailed plan might perhaps be reconstructed from the room by room survey made for the auction catalogue of 1781; its layout makes it possible to suggest that the Elizabethan tapestry maps, approximately 13 x 20 feet, showing Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire might very well have hung in the hall forming a panoramic view.⁵³ At much the same time that he built the house Ralph's portrait was painted by Hieronimos Custodis, one of several Flemish painters working in London around 1590. It hangs now in Warwickshire Museum.⁵⁴ A much earlier portrait, painted in the early 1560s, is now in a private collection.⁵⁵

But Sheldon's main occupation, after playing cards and 'mawe', (a piquet-like card game) was litigation and he was rarely out of the courts after his father's death. The story of his struggles at Brailes is detailed elsewhere; it lasted throughout his life.⁵⁶ His other long-running dispute was over lands at Ditchford Frary where he may have been pursuing the same enclosing policy he followed at Brailes.⁵⁷ He sought to exploit the advowsons of Tredington, one of the richest in the county, of Barcheston and of Stretton on Fosse, making use of Richard Hyckes, manager of the tapestry venture at Barcheston and the Queen's arrasmaker from 1569, to attend the court hearings as his representative since he himself was debarred by his religion from exercising the rights.⁵⁸ Like many other Catholics Ralph suffered from the malicious intentions of those who resented his wealth. His dispute with his son in law Russell has already been mentioned. A second instance where perhaps those who disliked his faith tried to get their own back on him is recorded in a Star Chamber case.⁵⁹ With his 'cousin' John Ashfield, Sheldon attempted to reclaim cattle which had been stolen, beasts which he had perhaps entrusted to Ashfield for safekeeping.

Sheldon, however, was not to be cowed and lived his life very publicly. The account books show him in nearly continuous motion, riding to London three and four times a year, either directly, or via Worcester. While trouble with the authorities stemming from his religious beliefs did not destroy his way of life it did inevitably interrupt its rhythm and it affected the dispositions Ralph made for the future. He purchased property at Steeple Barton in Oxfordshire in 1596 close to his lands at Deddington, and in 1600-1602 assigned land in Beoley to men long in his service.⁶⁰ His own lands, and therefore his son's inheritance, could to some extent be protected by putting the lands in trust and it is possible that this was done.⁶¹ A last reference to his lands, in Whychwood forest, is in the inquiry made as part of the general survey of the royal Forests in 1611.⁶²

Despite not holding any county office, locally at least, Ralph seems to have been of considerable influence, a figure both respected and feared. In 1601 the Privy Council saw fit to write to him and to his lifelong friend, Sir John Talbot of Bromsgrove, also a Catholic, telling them not to meddle in the election of Sir Thomas Leighton as sheriff; rumours that there was likely to be ‘some opposition made out of faction’ had reached London.⁶³ Two years later Sheldon joined in the politicking to elect a Catholic candidate to parliament; though a candidate was found, his election was prevented by means not altogether fair by the sheriff who, as the electoral officer, controlled the entry to the voting process of the limited number of people who made up the franchise and, without warning except to known supporters, changed both the time and place where the voting was to take place, thus successfully excluding the opposition.⁶⁴ Like many others, Sheldon may have had high hopes of a change in policies with the accession of James VI.

On 16 December 1603 his wife was buried.⁶⁵ It was probably about this time that he made the tomb for his father in the chapel on the north side of Beoley church, making one for himself at the same time.⁶⁶ The unknown sculptor had considerable skill. He also erected a monument to his grandfather. His second wife was Jane, daughter of William Lord de la Warr, widow of the Protestant Sir Thomas Tasburgh, her third husband. It does not seem to have been a happy alliance and his choice of a wealthy widow soon turned sour; the couple were at law over the jointure provisions within a year of the marriage, which took place sometime around April 1604.⁶⁷ She received nothing in the will other than her dowry lands.⁶⁸ There were no children and by then Ralph’s first family, one son and nine daughters, were all married.⁶⁹

NOTES

1. Ralph was said to be aged 33 in his father’s inquisition post mortem TNA C 142/159/87; his marriage was arranged in May 1557, Birmingham Archives, Barnard Miscellany 77/D/1 quoting deeds at Coughton Court, no. 811. Originals not checked.
2. E.A.Barnard, *The Sheldons*, Cambridge, 1936, p. 41.
3. J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, 3 vols London 1892; Oriel College.
4. E.A.Barnard & A.J.B.Wace, ‘The Sheldon Weavers and their work’, *Archaeologia*, vol.78, 1928, p.259. Possible confirmation that Ralph might have travelled abroad comes from letters of 1555, *Cal State Papers Venetian 1555-56*, nos 284-5.
5. *Register of Admissions to the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple*, ed. H.A.C. Sturgess, 3 vols, London 1949, vol. i, sv anno 1556.
6. William Whorwood, in S.T.Bindoff, *Members of the House of Commons 1509-1558*, HMSO 1982; Nicholas Heath, *ibid*.
7. His election to Parliament is quoted from P.W.Hasler, *Members of the House of Commons 1558-1603*; S.L.Adams, ‘Because I am of that Countrye and Mynde to Plante Myself There’; Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and the West Midlands’, *Midland History*, 20,1995, 21-74.

8. The Dean's Register of Oriel College 1446-1661, ed. G.C.Richards and H.E.Salter, *Oxford Historical Society*, vol. lxxxiv, 1926, p. 156.
9. TNA Prob 11/53.
10. TNA SP12/63; *CPR 1569-1572*, no.2191, 3002, 3036.
11. *CSPD 1547-80*, 458; *Acts of the Privy Council*, ed J. Dasent, viii, p.313, November 15 1574.
12. B.Lib. Harleian Ms 1043, f.52-53; *CPR 1575-78*, no.353 (5.11.76); *Inquisition post mortem* nos.242,1922.
13. *CSPD Addenda 1566-1579*, p.236, HMSO 1871; A Sheldon family was in the service of the earl of Shrewsbury there, *Catalogue of Shrewsbury Papers in Lambeth Palace Library*, ed. E.G.W.Bill, 1966, *Derbys. Arch Soc Record Series*, 1965, Ms 704, ff.104-110.
14. Ralph's 'conversion' based on his marriage was first suggested by Barnard, *op.cit.*; see also S.L.Adams, "Because I am of that Countrye..", note 7.
15. *CSPD 1547-80*, p.633; *Acts of the Privy Council*, xii, p.166, 254, 301-02.
16. *Catholic Record Society*, Miscellanea II, 1906, The Memoirs of Father Robert Persons, ed. Rev J.H.Pollen, p. 27 ; *CRS*, IV, 1907, p.5.
17. *CSPD 1581-90*, pp. 128,129, 138, 142. Paula Henderson, *The Tudor House and Garden*, Yale 2005, p.115, notes Hugh Hall as the author of a gardening treatise, British Library, Ms Royal 18.C.III. Hall, supposedly a monk at Bordesley, is not listed amongst the monks at the Dissolution, *VCH Worcestershire*, ii, 154 and Patrick McGrath and Joy Rowe, 'The Recusancy of Sir Thomas Cornwallis', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, vol. xxviii, 1961, 226-271, esp. p.244-47. In a similar context, it seems unlikely that Ralph was ignorant of the presence in Brailes around 1600 of Anthony Sherlock, the Appellant priest who betrayed Father Garnett, Philip Caraman, *Henry Garnett 1555-1606*, London 1964, p.342-3.
18. TNA STAC 5/R41/32; STAC 5/R12/34; L.J.Hotson, *I, William Shakespeare*, London 1937, pp. 29-34.
19. Alan Davidson, 'The Recusancy of Ralph Sheldon', *Worcestershire Recusant* , vol. 12 Dec. 1968, 1-7.
20. *Acts of the Privy Council*, xi, p.137; TNA E 401/1842-1846, 1587-89, Pells Rolls; Sheldon's personal account book for the years 1586-88, Sotheby's London, 15 December 1987, lot 228, is at Warwickshire County Record Office, CR 2632, f.185 (in future Sheldon accounts).
21. Sheldon served on the Worcestershire muster commission in 1569 (TNA SP12/65) but not on that for 1588 as Hasler, *The House of Commons*; BLib, Lansdowne, 56,

f.168; he was, however, one of the six highest Warwickshire contributors of arms in August 1588 when he provided 3 lance and 2 light horse, together with £50 in cash, TNA SP12/214, Sheldon accounts, fo115, 207, 208 and T.C.Noble (ed.) *The Names of those....*(1886), p.66. An idea of his own small arms emerges from Sheldon accounts, fos. 31, 45, 64, 83; John Smith, *Men and Armour for Gloucestershire 1608*, Alan Sutton 1980, p.84. Both Griffith and his brother Robert Jones, keeper of the accounts, later tutored Edward's children, Birmingham Archives Ms 3061/Acc1901-003/167982, receiving lands in Beoley, Ms 3061/Acc1901-003/167697. He protested against the levy from a borrowed house at Molesey, LM/COR/3/419, 421, 427, 428.

22. Conyers Read, *Lord Burghley and Queen Elizabeth*, London 1960, p.421.

23. *CSPD 1591-94*, p.531-2, 540-548; examination of Ralph, p.554, 555, 559. The family solicitor was also hauled in, Alan Davidson, 'Robert Atkinson, a famous lawyer', *Essex Recusant*, vol. 12 1970, pp.91-97. See also Vincent Burke, 'The Economic Consequences of Recusancy', *Recusant History*, vol 14, 1977-78,71-77.

24. *CSPD 1591-94*, p. 548; Alan Davidson, 'Edward Williams of Oxford: a Sheldon servant', *Worcestershire Recusant*, vol. 25, June 1975, pp.2-4. No evidence substantiates the relationship as nephew of Sheldon.

25. *CSPD 1603-10*, p. 26, 27, 110. In 1608 William met with William Trumbull, the English agent in Brussels, who had been instructed to hand over to him a jewel left in his safekeeping, for which he was later thanked by Sir John Throckmorton, *Hist Mss Comm Report on the Mss of the Marquess of Downshire at Easthampstead Park, Berks*, vol. ii, 1936, ed. E.K.Putnell and A.B.Hinds, p. 68, 69, 196.

26. Antonia Fraser, *The Gunpowder Plot*, 1997, p.188

27. For Horde, see *Victoria County History, Oxfordshire*, ed. A Crossley, vol. 13, p. 67, 1992. Confirmation of hospitality at Weston from Catholic Record Society, vol 18, *Recusant Roll 1592-3*, p.254.

28. Payments in Sheldon accounts, f.103 et passim.

29. A brief account of the entanglement is outlined in Hilary L. Turner, 'An early map of Brailes', *Warwickshire History*, Summer 2001, vol.xi, no.5, 182-193. It is hoped to give a longer account elsewhere; previous notices are incorrect because they have not made use of all the documents.

30. *CSPD Addenda 1580-1625*, p.527 = *SP15/39/135*; Sheldon's will, TNA PROB 11/121.

31. John Harington, *An Apology for Ajax*, 1596, ed. E.S.Donno, *Harington's Metamorphosis of Ajax*, 1962, 240.

32. *Hist. Mss Comm*. Salisbury xv, 60.

33. Alan Davison, 'Ralph Sheldon and the provost of Oriel', *Worcestershire Recusant*, no.21, June 1973, pp. 22-27; W. Wheeler, *Letters of Sir Thomas Bodley to*

Thomas James, Oxford 1926, 17,40,47,133,135,138; Sheldon's gift, W.D.Macray, *Annals of the Bodleian Library*, 2nd edition only, 1890, 37n.

34. Thomas Habington, *A Survey of Worcestershire*, ed. John Amphlett, *Worcester Historical Society*, 2 vols., 1895 & 1899, ii, 68.

35. Sheldon Accounts, ff 135,156,174,177,182; another book 'gran ludo' remains unidentified although Arthur Freeman has suggested Luis de Granada as a possible author. His '*a memoriall of a christian life*' Rouen 1586, and '*of prayer and meditation*', Rouen 1584, were both translated by R. Hopkins. No five volume edition of Luis de Granada is known. See also Tanner MSS.285-6, Bodleian Library, cited by Jason Scott-Warren, 'News, sociability, and bookbuying in early modern England: the letters of Sir Thomas Cornwallis', *The Library*, seventh series, vol.1., no.4, December 2000. I owe this reference to Paul Grinke, studying the library of Ralph 'the Great' Sheldon, d.1684.

36. H.M.Colvin, *The King's Works, 1485-1660*, vol.iii, pt.i, 179-180.

37. S. Bendall, *Dictionary of Land surveyors and local Mapmakers*, 2 vols, British Library 1997, i, 24-26.

38. Sheldon Accounts f.69 & British Library Add Ms 36583 f.1; *Calendar of State Papers Domestic 1598-1601*, 62.

39. Links to the Petres explored in Hilary L. Turner, 'Fit Symbolographie ? An early estate map of Brailes', *Warwickshire History*, vol. xi, no 5, Summer 2001, 182-193.

40. William Moulton see *VCH Gloucestershire*, ed. C.R. Elrington, vi, 1965, 250-258; for Ralph Holinshed see *ODNB*.

41. Birmingham Archives, Ms 3061/Acc1901-003/167885.

42. B.Lib. Lansdowne 161, f.90.

43. Greville B.Lib Add Mss. 36583, f.1.

44. Knollys B.Lib Add Mss. 36901, ff. 6,13, 28,33. Sheldon accounts fos. 24,33,44,60,74,85, 90,94,134,158,165. A letter to his agent Sir John Hubaud is at B.Lib. Harleian 4713, f.188.

45. Mrs Baldwin Chylde, 'The Building of Kyre Park', *The Antiquary*, xxi, 1890.

46. Sheldon accounts, for Pollard fos.3,8,17,54,56,58,60,122,169,186; for his step-mother fos.34, 121,127,188.

47. Ibid. fos. 126,129 for Ludovic Greville; for help to Fulke fos. 69, 190. For Sheldon's part in arrangements of the sale of Chastleton, Hilary L. Turner, 'Walter Jones of Witney, Worcester and Chastleton: rewriting the past', *Oxoniensia* 73, 2008, 33-43.

48. Ibid, fos. 35,54, 56, 120; to quarrymen in May and June 1586; payments to Richmond, about whom nothing else is known, were made steadily from the start of 1588. Purchase of the 'bordes', see note 45. G. Tyack, *Warwickshire Country Houses*, 1994, pp. 216-219, and 264 for Skilts; this account made no use of the account book and so is incorrect in saying that purchase marked the start of Ralph's building.

49. Michael Warriner, *A Prospect of Weston in Warwickshire*, Roundwood Press, Kineton, 1978, p.25, and p. 30 notes gateposts at Tidmington House, the altar frontal at Cherington. 'A Sheldon Mantel-piece', F Sydney Eden, *The Connoisseur*, vol. 100, no. 432, August 1937, 78-79, rescued in 1934 from the demolition of the second Weston House, its site outlined now by the garden wall. One of the portrait heads said to have decorated the gallery is pictured in *600 Years of British Painting*, introduction by Roy Strong, Denver Museum of Art, 1998, p. 56 and plate. It was sold at Christie's, New York, British Pictures 1500-1850, 1 December 2000, Sale no 6397, lot 12, present whereabouts unknown. Edward Croft-Murray *Decorative Painting in England* (vol 1, 1537-1837) and Henry Shaw, *Details of Elizabethan Architecture* p. 13 and plate 111 show drawings purporting to be the Tudor house.

50. John Harington, *Apology for Ajax*, 1596, ed. E.S.Donno, *Harington's Metamorphosis of Ajax*, 1962, 238-40; Long Compton Manor House, now a guesthouse, has painted glass shields, commissioned in 1677 by Ralph the Great to commemorate the family marriages, Stratford Record Office, Bloom Collection, DR 41/108.

51. John Nichols, *Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 vols. London 1823, I, p.xvii.

52. Christie and Ansell, Sale Catalogue August 28-September 11 1781, William Sheldon of Weston, Warwickshire; William Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*, 1737 edition.

53. Hilary L. Turner, "'A wittie devise": the Sheldon Tapestry Maps belonging to the Bodleian Library, Oxford', *Bodleian Library Record*, vol. 17, no 5, April 2002; *Warwickshire History*, vol. 12, no1, Summer 2002; *No Mean Prospect: Ralph Sheldon's Tapestry Maps*, Plotwood Press, 2010.

54. Roy Strong, 'Elizabethan Painting: An approach through Inscriptions - II: Hieronimo Custodis', *Burlington Magazine*, vol 105, March 1963, pp.103-108.

55. Private information, pictured in Roy Strong, *The English Icon*, 1969, p.126.

56. The map is owned by Warwickshire Museum but is stored in the Record Office, CR 3231; pictured in A.Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration in England 1558-1625*, Yale 1997, 70, 73. See also note 39.

57. B.Lib, Add Mss 36583, f. 62, 65, 231; Birmingham Archives Ms 3061/Acc1901-003, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a> for a listing.

58. TNA Req 2/66/15; Req 2/223/66, Req 2/121/32.

59. TNA STAC 5/S58/35.

60. Purchase of Steeple Barton 1596, *VCH Oxon* ed. A. Crossley, 1983, xi, 64; references to Deddington occur roughly every six pages in Sheldon accounts; also B.Lib Add Mss 36583, f.62. Birmingham Archives, Ms 3061/Acc1901-003/167982, receiving lands in Beoley, Birmingham Archives, Ms 3061/Acc1901-003/167697.

61. Some of the many deeds in Birmingham Archives Ms 3061/Acc1901-003/ - listed a2a as above - may well conceal such an aim; Michael Hodgetts, 'Elizabethan Recusancy in Worcestershire', part I, *Trans of Worcestershire Archaeological Society*, third series, vol 1, 1965-67, 69-78, part ii, *Ibid.*, vol 3, 1970-72, 81-91.

62. *Calendar of State Papers Domestic 1623-25*, p.572.

63. *Acts of the Privy Council, 1601-04*, 251.

64. See Ian D. Grosvenor, 'Catholics and politics: the Worcestershire Election of 1604', *Recusant History*, vol.14, 1977-78, pp.149-162.

65. Worcestershire Record Office, Beoley Parish Registers.

66. An account of the church is to be found in *VCH Worcestershire*, iv, 1924, 12-19, especially p.16. The tale of the gift of a large stone altar to Sheldon from Pope Gregory XIII is repeated there, but no authority is cited, nor in *Associated Architectural Societies Reports*, xxi, 1891, p. li. The stone can scarcely be described as 'portable'. In any case, it is Ralph the Great who spent time at Rome, Ms Wood B.14, f. 50-66. Also Rees Price, Report on the Sheldon Chapel, Beoley Church, *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society*, vol. xlix, 1926, 54-56.

67. Alan Davidson, 'The Second Mrs Sheldon', *Worcestershire Recusant*, December 1969 vol.14, pp.15-21 for some of her background. He did not know of TNA C 3/291/89 for their disputes; resolution of their differences appears in Ralph's will.

68. TNA PROB 11/121.

69. Ralph's son, Edward married Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Markham of Ollerton Notts; Elizabeth married Sir John Russell of Strensham, 13 March 1574; Mary, baptized May 1560, married Walter Fowler of St Thomas's Priory, Co Stafford; Muriel, baptized September 1566, married Sir Francis Clare of Candwell, Worcs; Jane, baptized November 1567, married John Flower of Whitwell, Rutland; Margaret, baptized May 1569, married – Standen; Anne, baptized December 1571, married Sir John Pershall of Horseley, Staffs; Katherine married Francis Trentham of Rocester, Staffs; Frances married Sir Anthony Manny of Lenton, Kent; Philippa, born 1571, married Sir John Sulyard of Wetherden, Suffolk.

Many more details of documents concerning the management of Sheldon's estates are to be found by using the Search the Catalogue of the National Archives at Kew.

Ralph's Epitaph at Beoley Church



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Text below translated by E A B Barnard

M.S.

To Ralph Sheldon Esquire

A man of great wisdom modesty, kindness

Remarkable for his gifts of knowledge and judgement (a rare mixture)

A generous and beloved citizen:

After he had spent his youth in studying at Oxford

He had visited France and other countries

And had lived at Court; then had married

The daughter of Robert Throckmorton Knight a wife who in

Her life set a remarkable example, by whom he begot one

Son and nine daughters, and from them were begat (more or less 130 descendants

He dedicated this Chapel to God (which) 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 (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