

***Tapestries once at Chastleton House and their influence on the image
of the tapestries called Sheldon : a re-assessment***

Hilary L. Turner

The intentions expressed in William Sheldon's will of 1570 suggest an attempt to introduce tapestry weaving at Barcheston, Warwickshire. Interpreted in the 1920s as resulting in a commercial venture – the only production centre in Elizabethan England – tapestries were attributed to it without documentary evidence, without stylistic comparison with continental work and without study of the records of émigré Flemish weavers settling in London from 1559 onwards. Their presence and a greater quantity of easily available comparative material, in both documentary and tapestry form, combine to question the previous picture, never revised. On re-examination, the historical evidence used to link tapestries found at Chastleton House with Sheldon's enterprise appears weak. Challenging the time-honoured belief that those tapestries should be regarded as key pieces in the Sheldon corpus also calls into question subsequent attributions made by association, and opens the way for a new exploration of the tapestry industry in sixteenth-century England.

***The discovery of the tapestries called Sheldon
and the creation of a legend***

In the early years of the twentieth century a number of tapestries were found in the smaller English houses, their place of origin unknown. Woven with widely differing competence in different styles and sizes, they came to be grouped together under the name 'Sheldon'. They were regarded as products of a workshop whose existence was inferred from the terms of the will of William Sheldon (d 1570) and the testimony of a seventeenth-century antiquary.¹ The provision in the will for short-term loans to be made to men who were formerly, were currently or might in the future work with a master weaver, and the subsequent arrangements for his occupancy of premises rent-free, were interpreted as definite evidence for the establishment of a tapestry-weaving venture at Sheldon's manor house of Barcheston near Shipston on Stour, Warwickshire. This was an unusual proposition in a country with no earlier indigenous tapestry-weaving tradition. Although Sheldon's epitaph commemorated

¹ Sheldon's will http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/p33_learn_ws_will.htm TNA (The National Archives), PROB 11/53; *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, antiquary of Oxford, 1632-1695, described by himself*, ed. Andrew Clark, *Oxford Historical Society*, 1891, i, 477n.

him as the first to introduce the art, his plan was not unique, nor was it the first.² Neither the workshop nor its products had established themselves sufficiently firmly with contemporaries or in memory to be readily recalled after activity ceased, probably in the early years of the seventeenth century. The name itself is anomalous because the Sheldon family – gentry and not merchants or craftsmen – played no part, other than providing premises. It was, however, a convenient label when, in the early twentieth century, Sheldon's scheme, virtually undocumented apart from the will, came back to life through the efforts of several individuals.

In the attempt to determine the workshop's products, eight pieces, disparate in size, style and usage, found at Chastleton House, Oxfordshire, in 1919 were among the most important.³ Five were large hangings; three were much smaller – possibly cupboard cloths or cushion covers. The tapestries were separated by sale within a year,⁴ dispersed amongst private collections; two have never been seen since. Although the discovery prompted investigation of the workshop, each tapestry was only briefly described, and they have never since been studied as a group. The question of why and how these pieces were 'recognized' and accepted as Sheldon products forms the first part of this study; their nature, and whether they should still be so regarded, makes up the second.

To clarify the meaning of the term 'Sheldon' and explain why the finds at Chastleton created such interest, it is necessary to look at the background of tapestry studies in England as they then stood. What is now an established, if ambivalent, label in English tapestry history then had only a shadowy existence. The recognition of the Chastleton tapestries as Sheldon work is the more surprising when it is realized that

² <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP33BIOGWmS.pdf>

³ 'John Humphreys and his work', *Studies in Worcestershire History*, ed. E.A. Barnard, Birmingham 1938, p.9 where the story is told in his own words.

⁴ Sotheby's London, 12 November 1920, Lots 128, 129; at least three failed to sell. One was offered again, Sotheby's 18 February 1921; two parts of lot 128 came on the market Sotheby's 7 July 1922, lots 164, 165. The first of the Judah series is in private ownership; the second is on show at Aston Hall, Birmingham, the last is owned by the Burrell Collection, Glasgow; the third, illustrated here, is in private ownership. The Judgement of Paris is on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The buyers were noted in *The Times*, 13 November 1920. The two tapestries not seen since are *Taste* and the third in the Judah series. The existence of a photograph of the latter made this study possible.

only two other sets were so classified in 1919 and almost nothing was known about Sheldon's plans. The earliest attribution, made first in 1911, about which there was rather more speculation than hard facts, was the set of the *Four Seasons*, now at Hatfield House. What was then interpreted as a woven date, 1611, and the arms of the Tracy family living not far from Barcheston at Toddington, Gloucestershire, were, in the absence of documentary evidence, understood by some to support the claim for an origin with Sheldon's weavers; others disagreed.⁵ The view was most strongly upheld by W. G. Thomson, author of the only history of tapestry in England (published in 1906), which had not included either this set or any other examples. He, however, was the first to describe Sheldon's scheme as a workshop, established 'due to the initiative of one Englishman and conducted by another'.⁶ His view still colours opinion.

The second product, very different in character, was a set of four tapestry maps. They portray the landscape, towns and gentlemen's houses across the counties of Oxford, Worcester, Warwick and Gloucester, in all of which the Sheldons held land. Each bears the arms of a different generation of the Sheldon family.⁷ The set was known to have been at the family's residence at Weston, Warwickshire; later

⁵ W. G. Thomson, *The Art Journal*, vol.73, July-December 1911 (August) and vol.74, Jan-March 1912. Much of the material was reprinted in the fuller W. G. Thomson, *Tapestry Weaving in England from the earliest times to the end of the xviiiith century*, (London, 1914), including an earlier paraphrase of Sheldon's will, p. 47. A.S. Cole's article, 'Tapestry' in the 11th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* illustrated Winter. Sir Wollaston Franks, a president of the Antiquaries in the early years of the century, is also said to have regarded the work as Sheldon; A.F. Kendrick disagreed, 'The Hatfield Tapestries of the Seasons', *Walpole Society Annual*, ii, 1912-13, pp.89-98, plates xlv-ly. H.L. Turner, 'A case of mistaken identity: the "Sheldon" *Four Seasons* tapestries at Hatfield House re-considered' *Emblematica*, vol. 19, 2012, pp.1-25. Michael Bath, *The Four Seasons Tapestries at Hatfield House*, Archetype, 2013 challenges the interpretation of the emblem motto as a date.

⁶ W. G. Thomson, *History of Tapestry*, (London, 1906), p. 280. His work was a corrective to earlier remarks such as "it was Henry VIII who was the last English monarch to be active upon it (tapestry manufacture) down at Mortlake, Surrey, where it had been introduced by William Sheldon." *London Society*, xxxv, 1879, p.320. Subsequent revised editions were issued in 1930 and 1973.

⁷ H. L. Turner, "'A wittie devise"; The Sheldon Tapestry Maps belonging to the Bodleian Library', *Bodleian Library Record*, xvii, no.5, April 2002, pp.293-313.

copies were sold from there in 1781.⁸ There could be no doubt to whom the tapestries had belonged or for whom they had been woven. Their place of weaving remained unknown.⁹

W. F. K. Bedford had brought the *Maps* to scholarly attention in 1897, summarizing the then-known evidence.¹⁰ The eighteenth-century Worcestershire historian, Treadway Nash, noted the epitaph of William Sheldon (d. 1570), which stated that he had introduced the art of weaving into England, and had set aside lands and money for the weavers' maintenance; Nash added that Sheldon had brought men from Flanders.¹¹ Oxfordshire's gossipy seventeenth-century diarist, Anthony Wood (1632-95), says that Richard Hyckes, whose name appears on one of the *Maps*, had been sent abroad by *Ralph* Sheldon to serve an apprenticeship – where, when, or for how long he did not know.¹² Hyckes then settled in Barcheston. Mention of Hyckes in *William Sheldon's* will, written in 1570 and rediscovered only in 1908 when extracts were published should have given the lie to Wood's remarks.¹³ Instead his words

⁸ Christie and Ansell, *A Catalogue of...Household Furniture ...of the late William Sheldon Esq., dec., at his seat called Weston near Long Compton, August 27th and 13 following days, 1781.*

⁹ No reference is made for example in Treadway Nash, *Collections for a History of Worcestershire*, London, 1781, 2 vols, i, pp.69-72.

¹⁰ W. K. Bedford, 'The Weston tapestry maps', *Geographical Journal*, ix (1896), pp. 211-215. Gough owned fragments; his observations were perceptive, but he maintained that the heraldry of the royal arms 'fixed the date to the time of Henry VIII' (1509-1547), a remark still repeated.

¹¹ Treadway Nash, *Collections for a History of Worcestershire*, London 1781, 2 vols, i, p.66.

¹² *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, antiquary of Oxford, 1632-1695, described by himself*, ed. Andrew Clark, *Oxford Historical Society*, 1891, i, 477n, quoting Bodleian Library Oxford, Ms Rawlinson D 807, f.15, "This Richard Hyckes here mentioned first was bound prentice to a Dutch arras worker in Holland by *Ralph* Sheldon (who built the great house at Weston in Com. Warw. anno 1588) and being out of his time, settled at Barston, a manour that belongs to the Sheldons and made and weaved those fair hangings that are in the dining room at Weston." William Dugdale (1605-85), Warwickshire's earliest historian, made no mention of the venture in his *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, 1656.

¹³ Extracts were first published by E. M. Jourdain, 'The Tapestry Manufacture at Barcheston', in Alice Dryden, *Memorials of Old Warwickshire*, London, 1908, pp.30-38. See also her biography <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37619>

were, and still are, much mis-quoted and their elision has created the assumption that the *Maps* were indeed woven at Barcheston.

The map tapestries were exhibited in the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1914.¹⁴ The display brought to light two further sections of the Gloucestershire tapestry map.¹⁵ It began to seem unlikely that the *Maps* were the only Barcheston products; the idea that there must be other Barcheston products steadily gained a hold, a possibility that intrigued a retired Worcestershire dentist, John Humphreys, who published a study of the Worcestershire examples.¹⁶ Subsequently, he and a collector, Colonel Henry Howard, made a determined effort to locate other tapestries by visiting all the houses in the Midlands that had once been connected with the Sheldon family. As Humphreys admitted, they had no success.

Mention of the Sheldon room at Chastleton House, close to the Sheldons' residence and to Barcheston, was an irresistible lure. In 1919, Humphreys reported his discovery of five large hangings there in a letter to A. F. Kendrick, Keeper of the Textile Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum. He wrote: 'I am confident that I have found *five* Sheldon domestic tapestries, four in excellent preservation.' He paid a second visit, on which he also reported to Kendrick, sending photographs. By return of post Kendrick replied: 'There can be no doubt whatever of the significance and importance of your discovery of the English tapestries at Chastleton.' In a postscript he added that: 'of course there can be no doubt that they are real Sheldon factory work'. In a letter to Colonel Howard the following day Kendrick wrote: 'He [Humphreys] tells me that you think it very probable that they are the work of the Sheldon factory and I entirely agree. I do not see how they can have possibly been made elsewhere. I hope that Mr Humphreys will publish them as they ought to be better known.'¹⁷ Thus was the workshop's style instantly recognized. Only

¹⁴ *V&A Portfolios, Tapestries*, London HMSO, 1915, the unacknowledged work of F.F.L.Birrell, a member of the Textile Department.
http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/p11_discoveries_eliz_maps.htm

¹⁵ Victoria and Albert Museum Archives (in future VAAR), MA/1/ B 1466 (Birkbeck); <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/guides/maps/sheldon.html>

¹⁶ J. Humphreys, 'The Sheldon Tapestry Maps of Worcestershire,' *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society*, xliii, 1918, pp.3-22.

¹⁷ The letters are in Whitmore-Jones file, VAAR MA/1/W 1719.

subsequently was a search for documentary support initiated. A year later, soon before their auction, Humphreys published the discoveries, his excitement prevailing over detailed description.¹⁸

John Humphreys widened his search for material. In 1924 he felt able to deliver a wider presentation of the subject to the Society of Antiquaries of London.¹⁹ The image he presented of the Sheldon output depended on the sixteenth-century ownership of a tapestry, sometimes established by initials, but usually by the presence of a coat of arms. Few of his finds had hitherto passed unnoticed and few were new discoveries, but none had previously borne the Sheldon label. None had any documented link to Barcheston. His choices conjured up a workshop of skilled weavers producing large tapestries with a floral or grotesque field. Most, together with some further additions made the next year by A. F. Kendrick, have since been attributed elsewhere, on stylistic grounds;²⁰ others, such as the Earl of Leicester's armorials, remain controversial.²¹ Humphreys cited two casual references to weaving at Barcheston; neither product survives. The first was payment to Hyckes by Sir John Talbot of Grafton in 1568 'for his armes'; the second an order for two 'chambers' in 1605.²² A third reference, thought doubtful even at the time, has since been

¹⁸ J. Humphreys, 'Some Recently Discovered Elizabethan Sheldon Tapestries', *Country Life*, October 9 1920, pp.463-4.

¹⁹ J. Humphreys, 'Elizabethan Sheldon Tapestries', *Archaeologia* 74, 1924, pp. 181-202, reprinted, with one additional picture, as a monograph, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1929; henceforward *Archaeologia* 74. It contains 22 mistakes; for a review see <http://tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/ElizabethanSheldonTapestriesreviewed.pdf>

²⁰ http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/p32_learn_doubt_attrbs.htm

²¹ The Drayton House tapestries, as they were then known, depict the arms of the earl of Leicester. A single documentary reference suggests that the earl made use of Richard Hyckes, director of the Sheldon works, to supply tapestry; the wording is too vague to prove that he was wanted as the weaver and the style of the tapestries held to be those the earl ordered shows none of the Sheldon characteristics. The document was published by J. Clark, 'A set of tapestries for Leicester House in The Strand: 1585', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxxv, 1983, 283-4; the tapestry has no certain identification. One is lost, two are in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow, the fourth illustrated http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/p15_discoveries_leicester.htm

²² Payment for the weaving at Barcheston in December 1568, 'The Elizabethan Estate Book of Grafton Manor', ed. J. Humphreys, *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society*, xlv, 1918, pp.1-124, pp 49, 83; the tapestry does not survive. Thomas Horde's demand for bed furnishings in 1605 was to be submitted to

disproved.²³ Although Humphreys' presentation was thoughtful, at no point did he make clear any general criteria by which a Sheldon origin might be established.

The debate that followed Humphreys' lecture revealed clearly that not everyone in the audience was convinced by his argument.²⁴ D. T. Baird Wood, of the British Museum, observed that the proportion of weavers employed by the sovereign in the Great Wardrobe to repair tapestries, whose accounts he had transcribed for the period 1485 to 1750, was roughly half Flemish and half English, contradicting Thomson's prevailing view.²⁵ Documentary evidence concerning the armorial tapestry found at Chastleton was pointed out. The tone of voice in which these remarks were delivered is lost and it is not certain whether either speaker was supporting Humphreys or opposing him. One person's reaction, however, comes across more strongly: Lord Crawford quite openly and definitely disagreed with Humphreys' attributions to a single workshop, observing that there were at least six different styles to be seen in the slides shown.²⁶

Tapestries continued to appear and to be recognized as Sheldon products with more enthusiasm than expertise. The newly appointed Curator of the Department of Textiles at the Victoria and Albert Museum, A. J. B. Wace – a classical scholar with a keen interest in, and knowledge of, Greek embroideries – was shown a number of pieces with three characteristics in common: their small size (roughly half a metre

arbitration and probably concealed other motives, Birmingham Archives, Ms 3061/Acc1901-003/167897. Humphreys did not quote the document in full.

²³ That Sheldon's men had worked for Bess of Hardwick, (W.G.Thomson, *History of Tapestry Weaving*, London, 1914, p.57), was considered unlikely by E.A.B. Barnard, in Barnard and A.J.B.Wace, 'The Sheldon tapestry weavers and their work', *Archaeologia* 78, 1928, pp. 255-314, p.279, henceforward *Archaeologia* 78. Shown to be wrong by S. Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance, The Hardwick Hall Textiles*, London 1998, p.33.

²⁴ The post-lecture discussion is printed only in *Archaeologia* 74, 1924, p. 201-2; its omission from the monograph of 1929 has allowed a fallacious estimate of the value of the article, which contains twenty-two errors of fact, see <http://tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/ElizabethanSheldonTapestriesreviewed.pdf>.

²⁵ D.T.B.Wood, 'The Tapestries of the 7 Deadly Sins', *Burlington Magazine*, vol 20, nos cvii, cviii, (Jan, Feb 1912), pp.210-222, 277-87 where Thomson's view that the majority of Wardrobe workers were English is examined.

²⁶ W. Gordon Hunton, *English Decorative Textiles*, London 1930, plate 10, depicts the Gloucestershire tapestry but it is incorrectly captioned as bearing the Dudley arms.

square); a central scene enclosed by an arcade; and horizontal borders containing hunting scenes. Some had already passed through the salerooms, others were about to do so.²⁷ What Wace saw prompted a two-pronged programme of research. As he himself said, it was necessary ‘in view of the number of recent attributions ... to review the whole of the material available, and to see how far we are justified in assigning a Sheldon origin to any particular piece’.²⁸ Wace himself set out to examine the tapestries to establish criteria by which tapestries might be assigned to the Sheldon looms. In the absence of any documented starting point, he made use of the discoveries at Chastleton to define the Sheldon style and products. A fresh look at the known sources and a search for new material about the weavers was entrusted to E. A. B. Barnard, a Worcestershire local historian and friend of Humphreys.²⁹ Their survey is the only work ever done on the subject.³⁰ This study is the first revision of those views.

The tapestries found at Chastleton

Mention of a ‘Sheldon room’ in a published inventory of goods belonging to Chastleton’s builder taken in 1633, prompted John Humphreys to visit the house,

²⁷ For example W. Cyril Wallis, ‘Sheldon Tapestries for the Royal Scottish Museum’ *Burlington Magazine*, vol. li, July 1927, pp. 25-6; R Lauder advertisement, *Connoisseur*, lxxv, (May 1926), no.297; Mr Behar’s Justice and Charity figure in letters in VAAR, MA 1/ V190, (Vereker) letter March 18 1926; A.J.B.Wace, ‘Some Tapestries in the Collection of Sir William Burrell’, *Old Furniture*, v, 1928, pp. 78-82. Yet Burrell’s Judith, now 47.23, was ignored.

²⁸ *Archaeologia* 78, pp. 255-314, esp. p. 287.

²⁹ Wace’s biography at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/74552> Barnard’s biography has been outlined K.Gill-Smith, ‘E.A.B.Barnard MA FSA FRHist S Freeman of Evesham’, *Vale of Evesham Historical Society, Research Papers* I, 1967, pp. 47-53 and again by Derek Watson, ‘The Bibliography of Ettwell Augustine Bracher Barnard MA, FSA, FRHistS 1872-1953’, *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society*, 3rd series, xvii, 2000, pp. 285-292. Barnard’s archive notes are deposited in Birmingham City Archives, his letters and diaries in Worcester Record Office and, his greatest achievement, the newspaper column based on documents of local historical interest in the *Evesham Gazette* (1921-1951) in Evesham Public Library. Of greatest interest there is a volume entitled Sheldoniana, a scrapbook of a family he clearly revered.

³⁰ *Archaeologia* 78, pp. 255-314.

which was still owned by the same family in 1919.³¹ In the preliminary account of his discovery Humphreys wrote that

the astonished visitor saw the wall covered with fine tapestries of evidently Elizabethan date. When the first moments of surprise were over, the tapestries were carefully studied, and confirmed our conjecture, for on one of them the date '1595' was woven in the right-hand corner. The quest ... had at last been successful and some of the long-looked-for treasures had actually come to light.³²

Three other pieces, noticed later, also came to be classified as Sheldon only because of their findspot. One was a small armorial tapestry showing the arms of Chastleton's builders; the second depicted a griffin enclosed within elaborate scrollwork; the third showed the allegorical figure of Taste. Very different both from the larger hangings and from each other, they instantly create assumptions about the capabilities of the Sheldon workshop, and raise questions about the range of goods woven there.

It was five years before John Humphreys set out supporting evidence for his claim that the five large pieces should be accepted as Sheldon products. It was later still that they served to establish the basis upon which the entire Sheldon style was reconstructed, because a link was assumed between the Jones family at Chastleton, the Sheldon family and the venture at Barcheston. There are, however, reasons to revise these conclusions. Tools lacking in the 1920s, when the tapestries were studied in a vacuum, are now available. Comparative tapestry studies began with the encyclopaedic tapestry historian, Heinrich Goebel.³³ Much more print, or printed, material that illuminates design sources is now more easily accessible.³⁴ Even so,

³¹ *Birmingham & Midland Institute Transactions, Excursions and Reports*, 15, 1888, 67-72, 78-82; in M. S. Henderson, *Three centuries in North Oxfordshire*, 1902, 214-221; in Mary Whitmore Jones, *The Gunpowder Plot and the Life of Robert Catesby, also an account of Chastleton House*, London 1909, pp.112-121; J. Marsden, 'The Chastleton Inventory of 1633', *Furniture History*, vol. xxxvi, 2000, pp.23-42, where note 22 assigns the tapestries to the wrong owners.

³² J. Humphreys, *Country Life*, October 9 1920, p.463-4.

³³ Goebel, *Wandeteppiche*, III, ii, Berlin 1934, 155-169.

³⁴ A. Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: The Influence of Continental Prints, 1558-1625*, Yale University Press, 1997, pp.221-234, in particular p.226. Henceforth *Art and Decoration*.

three possible avenues of investigation have remained unexplored: examination by style; comparison with both continental examples and the wider range of ‘Sheldon’ tapestries now known; and re-examination of the historical basis on which the attribution was first made.

What then do the tapestries that so excited Humphreys look like? Woven in wool and some silk, the five tapestries, unequally sized, have similar wide borders and a similar floral field on which the same cartouche frames a narrative episode. That central scene is identified by an inscription from a named source. Four tapestries (with a total length of approximately 12.5m), clearly commissioned and designed as a set, tell the story of *Judah and Tamar*, his daughter-in-law; on one of them a date, 1595, is clearly visible.³⁵ The inscription on a fifth tapestry declares its subject to be the *Judgement of Paris* (fig 1). This is a curious conjunction of themes, and whether it was designed as a companion piece or was part of another set, perhaps depicting the Trojan War, is not known. Each tapestry carries two sets of initials, reported as being WI, EI and HI. When they hung together, the tapestries must have presented the overall effect of a papered wall in which there is an open window. Studied from a distance, it is very much as though the cartouche was inserted into an already existing, perhaps second-hand, cartoon.³⁶

A guilloche strip, its twisted strands of red and yellow infilled at the centre in blue, defines both outer and inner sides of the wide outer border of each tapestry. On a red ground, it enclosed a composition made up, in the verticals, most obviously of large gourds and fruit set amongst large leaves with the occasional flower head (marguerites, narcissi) and smaller vegetables (peas in a pod), filling in otherwise empty spaces. Quite different in spirit, the horizontal borders show roses, poppies, pomegranates, cherries, apples, plums, pears and quince. Sections of the same pattern appear, sometimes upside down, across all five tapestries. As with the field, one is left with the impression that older – even second-hand – designs were being reused and economies made.

³⁵ The information was recorded by Humphreys in *Country Life*, (n.32), but he did not make clear to which tapestries his remarks applied and omitted to state in which tapestry the date was; it is incorrectly recorded in *Archaeologia* 78, p. 291, repeated by all other writers.

³⁶ Goebel, *Wandeteppiche*, III, ii, pp. 155-69.



Figure 1 The Judgement of Paris, Victoria and Albert Museum, London ©V&A Images

The central panel is filled with flowers of varying sizes on a darkish red ground. Many of the individual plants have been executed on a large scale, yet without the delicacy of detail this size would have allowed; they do not match the style of the border in that several flowers are shown complete from the roots upwards, each a picture in itself. They do not link or intertwine, but are treated as separate units; larger species were chosen for the base of the tapestry and smaller ones placed towards the top. The two sides into which the cartouche divides the panel are not decorated with a matching selection. Following John Humphreys' description, the flowers include hyacinth in bud and in flower, lily of the valley, mallow, primrose, cyclamen, convolvulus, strawberry, pink, stock, gillyflower, poppy, pansy, rose, iris, marguerite, lily and a dandelion. The same species marched along each lower edge; the upper edges show slight variations in selection from tapestry to tapestry. The cartoons were reduced to match the wall sizes by slight rescaling of individual plants, slicing through, or cutting out, the flowers which made the original too wide.

Into this background was set an elaborate strapwork cartouche, only recently identified as being based on a design first published in 1569 by Clemens Perret in his *Exercitatio Alphabetica*.³⁷ The design was radically simplified by omitting much of

³⁷ Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration*, p. 229.

the original detail shown outside the frame, so that, essentially, only the outline was retained; nevertheless, much of the elaborate decoration on the strapwork was painstakingly reproduced. Minor variations in the dimensions of the cartouche (approximately 1.4m high by 1.5m wide) exist from tapestry to tapestry; presumably the intention was that the size should remain the same and the position should be central. A capital-letter inscription, of white letters on a yellow ground, was woven into the inner border; three contain reversed letters and several orthographical errors. The elaborate decorative pendants of the original print were replaced by a tasselled cord, now sometimes missing completely and, where present, no longer balancing. The original design was a geometrically exact frame; distortions have been introduced by the copyist, the weavers or a later reweaving. The asymmetrical appearance would, to the sharp observer at least, have been visible when the tapestries hung together.

The tapestries have had a hard life. Large areas of colour variation in the reddish background distract the eye, raising the spectre of early reweaving, which is suggested also by tassels that are absent or unequal in number. One tapestry has been cut along the warps to allow for the opening of a door; another had been cut to fit over a fireplace, not its original position – it has subsequently been extensively rewoven.³⁸ When that depicting the *Judgement of Paris* underwent complete conservation in 1986, it was found to have been strengthened on the reverse by the use of wide linen strips along its horizontal borders and five more running from top to bottom.³⁹

The first of the four *Judah* tapestries (3.30m by 3.30m) shows Judah and his steward striding across open countryside towards a group of sheep shearers. In the second (3.30m by 3.66m), Judah gives his staff and a bracelet to a woman seated by the path, not recognizing her as his daughter-in-law, Tamar. In the third (3.23m by 2.29m), an irate Tamar confronts Judah, thrusting his gifts at him; behind her is a

³⁸ Appearance suggests that the Aston Hall example was slashed for the doorway, and Burrell 47.20 was the one reduced in size. Widely differing dimensions for the latter were given in Sotheby's catalogues of 1920 and 1922, and the tapestry has certainly been heavily restored. Sizes; Judah I 10 feet 10 inches x 10 feet x 10 inches (3.30m x 3.30 m.); Judah II 10 feet 10 inches x 12.00 feet (3.30 m. x 3.66m); Judah III 10 feet 7 inches x 7 feet 6 inches (3.23 m. x 2.29 m.); based on auction catalogue; Judah IV is now 10 feet 10 inches x 7 feet 9 inches (3.25. x 2.33 m).

³⁹ I am grateful to Val Blythe of the V&A Conservation Department for allowing me to see the conservation record.

seated lady, a helmeted figure and a male servant. Lastly, the most heavily re woven tapestry (3.23m by 2.29m) shows a curious rendering of the birth of Tamar's twins, fathered by Judah. The babies occupy a large bed; a female figure stands at its foot. Two ladies occupy the right-hand corner of the tapestry, their presence pointless unless they are the midwives washing the newborn children.⁴⁰

The drawing of the figures in each central picture, always with a landscape background, is ill proportioned and lacks a sense of perspective. No source from which the pictures might have derived has been found. The theme of Judah and Tamar is rare, whether in print, paint or wool. Martin Heemskerck drew a version so different that it can be excluded as the model; a lost suite by Hubert Goltzius has also been suggested.⁴¹ Had either been used it would imply a level of sophistication to which the tapestries might aspire but which they certainly did not achieve. Another possible, and closer, derivation might lie in the illustrations of the months of February and December in Edmund Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*.⁴² Given the importance of the tapestries for the standards of the supposed Barcheston looms, it is a pity that it is impossible to assess whether the cartoon is a bad copy or a poor original. The inscription identifying each picture, in the English of the Geneva Bible, was interpreted as suggesting, and even confirming, an English origin for the weaving. It might, however, do no more than indicate an English patron and purchaser for a commission executed elsewhere. That the workshop must be at Barcheston does not instantly emerge from the evidence of the tapestries themselves.

The Judgement of Paris

Particular reference to one tapestry – showing the *Judgement of Paris* (3.25m by 3.60m) – indicates how far the accepted conclusions can be revised (fig 2). Despite

⁴⁰ New Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, c.1450-1700*, Compiled Ilja Veldman, ed Ger Luitjen, publ Koninklijke van Poll, Roosendaal, 1993, no.42/1.

⁴¹ A. Pigler, *Barokthemen*, Budapest, 1974, 3 vols, vol I, pp. 78-80 listed L van Leyden, Heemskerck, Herman Jansz Muller and, for Tamar only, Hendrik Goltzius, suggested by Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration*, p. 316, n.22, prints not located.

⁴² E.Spenser, *Shepherd's Calendar*, 1579 facsimile edn, 1968, Scolar Press, Menston

the clear declaration of the inscription – WHEN PARESE GAVE THE GOLDENE APPEL – it is hard to explain why neither the depiction nor the source cited – OUT OF OVIDS EPESTELS IX CHAPTER – reflect the classical myth or the most common pictorial representations. In the most popular version of the story – the one told by Apuleius in his *Metamorphoses* – Paris was ordered to resolve the dispute between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, each of whom claimed the golden apple. In this version, only the latter was naked,⁴³ but in Lucian's account, Paris decided he would be better able to judge if they all disrobed.⁴⁴ He scrutinized Athena and Hera first, before being seduced by Aphrodite, the eventual winner. Ovid's references present both views.⁴⁵ In this tapestry, Paris rather timidly extends the apple to the lady nearest him while her companion on the right is seated. Immediately, anomalies are apparent – there are only two ladies where there should be three; both are clothed; one is seated. The designer appears to spurn, ignore or be unfamiliar with the traditional and most commonly encountered iconography, producing a depiction inconsistent with the literary source it claims to follow. In fact, the chapter reference is itself incorrect. What looks like the learned presentation of a classical theme thus contains a number of contradictions.

Yet the clue to decipherment – the lack of a lady – lies in what appears to be an amusing, if unfortunate, design fault. This scene, supposedly representing the Judgement of Paris, could at least as plausibly depict the third episode in the suite telling the story of Judah and Tamar – that in which Tamar confronts Judah – shown on a tapestry not seen since its sale in 1920. It is identified by a quotation from the Geneva Bible: 'by the man to whom these things pertayne am I with child'; the upper line now reads 'Genesis the viii 1595' (again, the source is incorrect – it should be chapter 38, a mistake that might result from reweaving). That aside, the depiction (fig 3) contains at least as many inconsistencies as the *Judgement of Paris* panel. Five

⁴³ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 10, 232 (Hanson 1989, 275-85); Margaret A. Scherer, *The Legends of Troy in Art and Literature*, London, 1963.

⁴⁴ *Lucian*, ed. A. M. Harmon, Loeb, 8 vols, 1921, vol 3, pp.383-409.

⁴⁵ Ovid, *Heroides* xxx-xxxvi, ed. E.J.Kenney, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, CUP 1996.



Figure 2 detail, Judgement of Paris

Victoria & Albert Museum, London ©V&AImages



Figure 3 Tamar confronts Judah ©

figures are shown – two men and three women – the same number needed to tell the Paris story. One is helmeted – presumably intended to be Athena – while the two others could represent Hera and Aphrodite, perhaps shown in the moments before Paris requested that they all disrobe. The seated lady however remains a puzzle; one might suppose she had been imagined or imported from a totally unrelated print or by corruption of some other model, or in ignorance of the story. Whatever the explanation, there are three women, while Hermes, messenger of the gods shown in several of the sixteenth-century print sources,⁴⁶ has suffered a somewhat incongruous transformation into an Elizabethan gentleman. A charitable view of a provincial workshop's capabilities – if not rigid scholarship – might allow the result to pass as a crude resemblance to traditional representations of the Judgement. Clearly the same model was used as the basis for the figures in the tapestry purporting to be the story of Paris – the two ladies, in the same pose as before, facing the seated male in shepherd's clothes. But this would do equally well as a minimalist design for Tamar's accusation of her father-in-law. Only one small alteration is needed: rather than showing the apple, it should depict the jewellery given to Tamar which testified to the truth of her accusation.

⁴⁶ Pigler, *Barokthemen*, vol I, pp. 204-12.

If the tapestry that claims to show the Judgement of Paris is accepted as such, then to omit a figure in a story likely to be familiar to many viewers seems absurd, and an explanation for the strange depiction is required. The simplest is that the captions were muddled. There is no reason to assume that the weavers would be able to recognize the story from the cartoon delivered to them. The fault is more probably the designer's. Herein lies the rub. Received wisdom claims that the products of Barcheston were the designs of the Hyckes. Of course, Hyckes would not be the first to muddle his captions. But even if this is accepted as a plausible explanation, other questions remain to be answered. In the first place, that the mistake should be ascribed to Francis Hyckes, son of Richard, sits uncomfortably with what little is known of his background. He is often credited, as though he had studied the nineteenth-century curriculum, with a classical education at Oxford University. He would later translate some of the dialogues of Lucian, though not this story.⁴⁷ It is, of course, possible to assume that his interest in Lucian's text was already engaged and that he might have suggested the idea. But if he did, he had the knowledge to avoid muddling the captions. One might go on to speculate over what this says about a level of supervision so relaxed that someone with a strong interest in the business could thus reduce the value of a suit of hangings. What of the reactions of the supposed purchaser, Walter Jones, whose own education was equal to that of Hyckes? And what of those of other, equally well-educated, viewers?

Another explanation, however, might be that the weavers, or their pattern drawer, were copying a source, not previously identified, that they themselves bowdlerized. Just such a model exists. Three tapestries, at least, of scenes from the Trojan War cycle were woven in Brussels in the last third of the sixteenth century; they hang now in the *Casa de Viana* at Cordoba and include the *Judgement of Paris*.⁴⁸ Their Brussels origin is vouched for by the city mark, double Bs, and by their initials. Although the interpretation of the latter is in doubt, either possibility points to a known Brussels master. The tapestry presents the scene with a very similar disposition of the protagonists, shown in poses very like those on the Chastleton tapestry. One figure, that of Mercury, stood closer to Paris than to the ladies, while

⁴⁷ http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP36BIOGF_Hyckes.pdf

⁴⁸ F. Lara Arrebola, *Artes Textiles en el Palacio de la Casa de Viana en Cordoba*, Cordoba 1982, pp.41-59.

Cupid, omitted on the Chastleton tapestry, divided the groups. Most interesting, however, is the fact that all three ladies are clothed and the one on the right, helmeted and clearly Athena, appears to be seated, not comfortably in a chair but on the ground, the folds of her dress billowing around her. There is, therefore, a model available from which the Chastleton tapestry could have been derived.

How could this model have found its way to England? Why would an English patron have chosen the theme? To deal with the latter first. The Judgement of Paris has a long history as a flattering metaphor in the literature of Tudor England and appears in a wide range of contexts.⁴⁹ More specifically, George Turberville had translated the *Heroides* in 1567. Midway between masque and drama, a play entitled *The Arraignment of Paris* had been presented at court by the Children of the Queen's Chapel sometime between 1581 and 1585, when the script was published. In 1594 Thomas Heywood published a lengthy versification called *Oenone and Paris*, in parts little more than a translation combining lines from Ovid and Lucian, already familiar texts. The same theme underpinned Richard Barnfield's *Cynthia*, published early in 1595, where the apple was awarded to Queen Elizabeth. None, however, was published with an ornamental title page that might have been copied as a cartoon source for the tapestry.

The subject therefore was highly topical in England in 1595 and its choice then, if the woven date is a reliable guide, would have been almost modish, at least in London society. It must surely rest with the patron or at least with his concurrence with the designer's suggestion. Selection of a possible model would most probably have been left to the designer, the person most likely to know of models for a theme popular in other media, and previously employed also in tapestry, examples of which were in the possession of the English monarch and the nobility.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ J. D. Reeves, 'Paris as a device of Tudor Flattery' *Notes & Queries*, vol 199, January 1954, 7-11, for other examples.

⁵⁰ Several sets were known in England; to those listed by Scott McKendrick, 'The Great History of Troy: a reassessment of the development of a secular theme in late medieval art', *Jnl of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, liv, 1991, pp. 43-82. To these should be added a set belonging to the earl of Leicester, *Hist Mss Comm Report on manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley preserved at Penshurst Place*, I, 1925, p. 297, W.G. Thomson 1930 ed. p.275; a provincial version is illustrated in H. Goebel, *Wandteppiche*, I, ii, no 475.

The woven date makes the choice of theme by an English patron explicable; the language of the inscriptions points to an English commission. If one accepts the validity of the claim for a Brussels tapestry as a model, is there anything else in the Chastleton tapestry which would support, if not execution in a Brussels workshop, at least an origin in England?

The species of flowers had been identified when the tapestries first came to light; no consideration was given to the possibility that they might not be original drawings but had been derived from an external source. Like the *Maps* and the *Four Seasons*, the tapestries' design was credited to the skills and originality of Richard Hyckes. The first person to question the Chastleton attribution was Heinrich Goebel.⁵¹ He noted the similarities between Brussels mid-sixteenth-century work and the Chastleton specimens. Closer examination reveals their likeness to the meticulous illustrations of the plant books published in increasing numbers throughout the sixteenth century.⁵² One such book in particular, the *De Historia Stirpium* (1542) of Leonhardt Fuchs, was sold both bound and as single sheets; the influence of his work is traceable in tapestry and might well have been the source here, either directly or at second hand through earlier tapestries. Examples of his flowers can be seen in tapestries produced in Brussels and the southern Netherlands in the middle years of the sixteenth century.⁵³ It should be noted, however, that few of the species, or their stylistic presentation here, are commonly repeated in other 'Sheldon' floral tapestries, in which different influences can be traced.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the border pattern, also vegetal, remains unique even in the enlarged repertoire now known; approximate parallels exist amongst the less distinguished tapestries of the southern Netherlands.⁵⁵

A further peculiarity also sets these tapestries apart from other 'Sheldon' products. Wace commented that the size of the picture enclosed by the cartouche is not very different from the size of the smaller, more commonly found tapestries

⁵¹ Goebel, *Wandeteppiche*, III, ii, pp.162-3.

⁵² *Herbals, their origin and evolution*, Agnes Arber, 3rd edition revised W. Stearn, Cambridge, 1986.

⁵³ S. Franses, *Giant Leaf Tapestries of the Renaissance 1500-1600*, New York, 2005.

⁵⁴ For example in the illustration in *Archaeologia* 78, plates li, lii, lv.

⁵⁵ I. de Meûter, *Tapisseries d'Audenarde du XVIe au XVIIIe siecle*, Tielt, 1999, p. 155.

regarded as cushion covers. An oft-repeated statement, this is not really the case.⁵⁶ On such pieces, the scene depicted, including the pillars of the arch, measures rather less than 380mm by 380mm; the cartouche here encloses an irregular space measuring 790mm by 860mm, roughly double that size.

Evidence now suggests that a search for a place of origin outside Barcheston is justified. A tapestry model existed in Brussels and the theme was topical in London at the time of the date in the tapestry. It is not too difficult to accept that, perhaps in haste to produce an up-to-date and topical theme, the captions were muddled, so that the subjects of two tapestries were mislabelled and misattributed. However, since classical themes did not play any part in the Sheldon repertoire, should one turn one's back on Barcheston and seek an explanation amongst the Flemish weavers living in London? As we shall see, their presence was ignored in the earlier research, but there were at least nineteen men who certainly came from Brussels. Amongst them was a team of ten, apparently living close together in Broad Street, near a painter (and possible cartoon maker), John Droeshout, also from Brussels, and all of them arrived between 1583 and 1585.⁵⁷ Though nothing specifically links them to the Chastleton tapestries, their claims to be its weavers are no less strong than those of the men at

⁵⁶ *Archaeologia* 78, p. 292.

⁵⁷ R.E.G.Kirk and E.F.Kirk (eds), *Returns of Aliens dwelling in the City and Suburbs of London from the Reign of Henry VIII to that of James I*, Huguenot Society of London, Quarto Series, vol 10 in four parts, 1900-1908 ii,318 (henceforth Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*). It seems at least as probable that, contrary to the information in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography's entry for Martin Droeshout, thought to be the engraver of the Shakespeare portrait in the First Folio (1623), it is this John Droeshout who should be regarded as his father. This John was recorded in a document of the Dutch Church listing new members admitted between July and October 1585 (Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, ii, 387); Lionel Cust, 'Foreign Artists of the Reformed Religion Working in London from c.1560-1660', *Procs of Huguenot Society*, vol. vii, no.1, 1903, 45-82, p.62). It must also be this John who in turn stood guarantor for his son Martin in 1592 (Cust, p. 62) on the latter's acceptance, himself Brussels-born (Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, iii, 183) because the other John Drussait said in 1593 (Irene Scouloudi, *Returns of Strangers in the Metropolis 1593, 1627, 1635, 1639*, Huguenot Society of London, Quarto Series, vol. 57, London 1985, no. 409) that he had been resident in London for 24 years and his four children, one of them also called Martin, were all English-born. Those children would have been baptized into the Dutch Church without the need for testimonials. ODNB follows A. M. Hind, *Engraving in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, Cambridge 1952, ii, 341, in whose pages the confusion starts, because he had no access to the detailed information in the Returns of 1593.

Barcheston. Because these tapestries have never been properly studied, the peculiarities in the presentation of a well-known theme have never been remarked on, nor has the level of workmanship been the subject of comparison.⁵⁸ But if it was woven by men in a position to be familiar with a model, at least for the *Judgement of Paris*, but not necessarily with the tale, then the singular presentation and the mix-up of the captions becomes much easier to understand. Nevertheless, even if wider knowledge of the design sources, never previously investigated, casts a very different light on the nature of the tapestries, still nothing leads only to Barcheston.

Before re-examining the historical evidence which created that link, a description of the other three tapestries found at Chastleton is necessary. The Jones–Pope armorial, woven on woollen warps, with wool, silk and metal thread, measures 813mm by 1118mm.⁵⁹ The arms of Walter Jones and his wife, Elinor Pope, are enclosed within a strapwork cartouche. Designed by Cornelius Bos and first published in 1554;⁶⁰ it is used here upside down. Below the shield the Latin inscription, in white letters against a repaired blue ground, reads DVLCE I PERICVLVM SEQVI DEVM (‘It is sweet in danger to follow God’), a motto with no known connection to the family. The whole is enclosed by a border in which a stylized composition of fruit and flowers alternates on three sides with small quatrefoil strapwork scrolls, each with a flower at its centre; the right hand vertical border does not match.

The centrepiece is set between interlinked flowers, identical on both sides. Six large blooms, executed largely in red – one of them a pomegranate, another a rose – are separated by scrolling foliage bearing two blue flowers – possibly columbine and honeysuckle. Unlike the flowers in the larger tapestries, the species are not immediately recognizable, nor are they particularly lifelike. The tapestry’s original state is hard to assess; much has faded, much has been repaired and the metal thread, used abundantly, has tarnished. When the tapestry was sold in November 1920, before

⁵⁸ A.F. Kendrick, *Victoria and Albert Museum Catalogue of Tapestries*, London 1924, no.1a; G. Wingfield-Digby, *The Victoria and Albert Museum, Catalogue of Tapestries Medieval and Renaissance*, London 1980, no.70. Neither author commented on the omission.

⁵⁹ Burrell Collection, Glasgow, accession no. 47.21.

⁶⁰ Wells-Cole, *Art & Decoration*, p.229 & fig.51. It originally enclosed a quotation from Seneca.

any serious study of the Sheldon factory had been undertaken, it was dated 1570-80.⁶¹ Eight years later, however, Wace regarded it as a Sheldon product by association with the other finds at Chastleton.

On a second tapestry (112mm by 660mm), a large bird – an eagle or a griffin – sits at the centre of a strapwork design; the narrow borders are made up of armillary spheres and grotesques. At the time, the resemblance of the latter to tapestries once owned by the Earl of Leicester and of the central device to the emblems surrounding the *Four Seasons* – both thought to be Barcheston products – weighed heavily in the attribution. It is now possible to suggest that the bird may possibly have been adapted from the emblem of St John,⁶² while the strapwork was borrowed from illustrations by Derek Coornheert. The border could very well have been derived from one that framed a printed almanac of 1582, but also used later; the tapestry is a prime candidate for manufacture in London, for certainly nothing points only to Barcheston.⁶³ The tapestry bears the meaningless motto EXΩN OYK EXOMAI, almost certainly a late replacement of whatever had been there before, though frequently associated with Francis Hyckes's knowledge of Greek.⁶⁴ The words have no known link to the Jones family.

The final tapestry (915mm by 635mm), not seen since 1920, portrays a female figure seated in a garden beneath pear and apple trees, holding a flagon in her hand and staring at a basket in front of her that overflows with fruit. A small monkey dances in the shadows. A Latin inscription across the top reveals that the figure represents Taste – SENSORVM GVSTATVS EST NERVVS SVPRA LINGVAM EXPANSVS AD QVEM SAPOR PERVENIT DVCTVS A SALIVA ('Of the senses, taste is the sensation spread out on the tongue, to which savour comes carried by the saliva'). In a style frequently found in earlier sixteenth-century continental tapestries,

⁶¹ Sothebys Sale Catalogue, London, 12 November 1920, lot 132.

⁶² My own suggestion would be Hans Schaufflein, *Evangelium*, Hollstein, German, vol 42, 1996, no.282. An appeal for help in identification received an unhelpful response, *Notes and Queries*, April 18 1925, p.278 and *ibid*, May 16 1925, p.357.

⁶³ Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration*, p. 222; where the illustration is a later use, R.B. McKerrow and F.S.Ferguson no.196, list its use in 1589, 1594, 1597 and on 9 other occasions after 1605, in *Title Page Borders used in England and Scotland 1485-1640*, Bibliographical Society Illustrated Monographs, no.xxi, OUP, 1932 (for 1931).

⁶⁴ *Archaeologia* 78, p. 292.

and with little relationship of its details to the larger tapestries found in the house, this too was claimed as Sheldon work. It can now be seen to have been copied, in every detail including the inscription, from a print by Cornelis Cort, to which the weavers added the narrow floral borders.⁶⁵

The eight tapestries found at Chastleton are therefore stylistically inconsistent with each other, though each has obvious relationships to continental work. None can be shown to have an incontrovertible connection to the looms at Barcheston.

The historical associations

The last step is to re-examine the historical evidence put forward to support the link. Having claimed the tapestries as Sheldon products, Humphreys had then to make his case. He had been led to Chastleton by publication of an inventory of 1633 that mentioned Mr Sheldon's chamber hung with three pieces of arras worth £20. It also listed arras in a number of other rooms and 'fower large quarter mapps' in the great gallery, a seductive proposition in view of his interest in the known tapestry maps.⁶⁶

His thinking continued:

The reading of the inventory stimulated the researchers, who realized that if still in existence they [the maps] must be the work of the Barcheston looms. Ralph Sheldon was evidently the personal friend of the new lord of Chastleton; his residence at Weston Park was only a dozen miles distant, and the Barcheston factory less than ten miles off. It was only natural that the new hangings for the great house would be bought there.

After the examination of the state rooms without result, the butler's bedroom was entered, and lining the walls were

⁶⁵ Sotheby's London 12 November 1920, lot 130, illus, identified as Plenty. *Frans Floris, Leven und Werken*, Carl van de Velde, Brussels, 1975, fig 291.

⁶⁶ J. Marsden, 'The Chastleton Inventory of 1633', *Furniture History*, vol. xxxvi, 2000, pp.23-42.

discovered five neglected pieces of tapestry, but of beautiful design, which turned out to be the long-sought treasures. There was no mistaking the workmanship which bore such strong resemblance to the tapestry maps, and the opinion was confirmed by a critical examination when the date 1595 was found on one hanging.⁶⁷

Humphreys' conclusions contain a number of hypotheses. Firstly, 'there was no doubting the workmanship'. Certainly the even lower warp count and the absence of silk or metal thread provides a passing resemblance both to the *Maps* and to the *Four Seasons*, the only other products then thought to be Barcheston work. But Barcheston is far from being the only workshop to produce coarse-woven tapestries. Secondly, the friendship between the families was a *deduction* from the inventory's reference to Mr Sheldon's chamber, written in 1633 twenty years after Ralph Sheldon's death. The third point, Jones's ownership of Chastleton by 1595, the date woven into one tapestry, was an *assumption*. And it was an incorrect one. Walter Jones bought the property in 1602; the deeds, then with the family, make this clear. Moreover, the information was already in print, apparently noticed by Humphreys only after his initial publication.⁶⁸ The argument based on proximity was, therefore, weak from the beginning, making it hard to see why tapestries bearing a date 1595 could be thought to be connected to looms close to Chastleton by virtue of a purchaser living elsewhere.

No evidence supports the assumption of friendship between Jones and Sheldon, which is now treated as though it were an incontrovertible fact. Admittedly, Sheldon had been amongst the several trustees (all relatives) who had lent money, on security of the property at Chastleton, to the previous owner, his own distant cousin Robert Catesby of Gunpowder Plot notoriety. As one of several mortgagees, Sheldon was a signatory on the deed of sale in 1602 in virtue of his relationship to Catesby, not out of friendship with Jones.⁶⁹ Thereafter Sheldon makes no further appearance in

⁶⁷ *Archaeologia* 74, 1924, p.191.

⁶⁸ M. Whitmore Jones, *The Gunpowder Plot and the Life of Robert Catesby, also an account of Chastleton House*, London, 1909, p.71.

⁶⁹ Oxfordshire Record Office (ORO), E/24/1/1D/13-21. In June 1601 Catesby acknowledged a recognizance of £6000 to Walter Jones and his son, TNA LC 4/195,

the Jones archives. There is no obvious reason why he should. Jones was not then living close by and was on the side of the Protestant establishment; Sheldon was a known Catholic, contact with whom might be impolitic. The fireplace carved with the Sheldon family arms (not indisputably attributable only to Ralph because there are no quarterings for his second wife) in the room which, by 1633, bore that name is not likely to have been placed there until the completion of the house, now thought to have been around 1612, the last year of Ralph Sheldon's life.⁷⁰ Apart from the Sheldon family's local status and their earlier, distant, link to the property it is hard to imagine why the arms were carved. The choice was probably made in the same spirit that the arms of Sir Thomas Pope (lately of nearby Wroxton, d.1558) were deliberately employed in the Great Chamber to create the illusion of kinship and an impression of Jones's social status even though both were entirely false. Elinor Pope, who married Walter Jones in 1573, was not Thomas Pope's relative as was thought in the 1920s. She was Helen Mekys, daughter of a goldsmith born in the German duchy of Cleves. Her father Henry, registered in the records as Mekys alias Pope, had been resident in London for at least twenty years before the unusual alliance between a stranger's daughter and an Englishman took place.⁷¹

When, by 1924, Humphreys had had time to do more research, the date of Jones's purchase was correctly stated as 1602. Nevertheless, he still insisted that proximity of the houses and the Jones's initials made it reasonable to assume that the tapestries were woven on the Sheldon looms.⁷² Even if one accepts the underlying assumption – that Jones bought the tapestries in or around 1595 – Humphreys' argument that they are Sheldon products, based on Jones's closeness to the nearest tapestry supplier, is demolished, and the supposed friendship is thus rendered superfluous. If 1595 is a date with chronological, rather than commemorative, value, then Walter Jones was not resident near either Barcheston or Weston. The date is indeed compatible with the possibility of tapestry weaving at Barcheston, but it is

f.184v; it was never cancelled. In 1628 William, probably Ralph Sheldon's nephew at Broadway, was amongst other mortgagees for a piece of land, E/24/1/4D/6.

⁷⁰ *Chastleton House*, National Trust 1997.

⁷¹ ORO, E/24/5/D/1. Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, i, 312, 327, 411, 436 .

⁷² *Archaeologia* 74, pp. 191-192.

neither conclusive about the tapestries' origin, nor exclusive of any other source of manufacture.

Unfortunately, even 1602 is not the whole truth. Tradition claimed that Jones began to rebuild the house immediately after his purchase, completing it around 1620. It is now known – also from the family deeds – that he did not, in fact, take possession until 1606,⁷³ generously – though curiously – allowing the former owner to make use of the property until he was killed in flight from capture as the instigator of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605. Jones then demolished the old house and the new building work has more recently been dated to the years 1606 to 1612.⁷⁴ This scarcely helps establish the origins of the tapestries, for clearly Jones and his family were resident somewhere else.

In the 1920s it was widely thought that the Jones family lived in Witney, some 20 miles distant.⁷⁵ Tacitly this was accepted as being close enough to Barcheston to be no impediment to the purchase of tapestries. Humphreys, who had observed that the tapestries did not fit the room in which they hung, suggested that they had been made for Jones's house at Witney. This too is incorrect, though it is consistent with information available at the time. Although Walter was born in Witney, the son of a cloth merchant, nothing indicates that he lived there after he left to attend Oxford University, whence he progressed to a legal training at Lincoln's Inn. By 1583 he was town clerk of Worcester and, around 1592, he became an attorney to the Court of Star Chamber, a post that would have required residence in London, at least during the law terms. He returned to Worcester, was appointed a Justice of the Peace around 1599, and remained an occasional resident until at least 1620. He described himself as being 'of Chastleton' on only two occasions.⁷⁶

A further error, repeated ever since, lies in the reporting of the tapestry details. Family tradition had long maintained that the initials W, E and H represented Walter, Elinor and Henry Jones's first ownership. Humphreys never pointed out, and perhaps

⁷³ ORO, E/24/1/1D/28,29.

⁷⁴ *Chastleton House*, National Trust 1997, p.5.

⁷⁵ H. Avray Tipping, *English Homes*, part iii, vol., I, 1929 299-317, esp. p.300 sketches Jones' life as then understood.

⁷⁶ H.L. Turner, 'Walter Jones of Witney, Worcester and Chastleton: re-writing the past', *Oxoniensia* 73, 2008, pp.33-43

because of their poor condition or because of their removal from the house soon after his discovery, never even noticed, that in two tapestries the initial is M, not W.⁷⁷ Obviously a reversal of letters, and possibly no more than a mistake of later replacement weaving by an inexperienced weaver, it nevertheless leaves open the question of which is the correct original. But, ‘inexperience’ does not describe the level of work executed by the weavers of the four *Maps*, which contain more than 200 names each, and no reversed letters; still less does it describe the lettering of the 170 mottoes filling the borders of the *Four Seasons*, in both instances then considered to have been work of weavers at Barcheston. The quality of the lettering thus becomes an important consideration, for, if the letters should be read as MI rather than WI, the argument that Walter Jones was the first owner collapses. It certainly suggests caution in accepting an identification already circular and based on weak evidence. Moreover, the marriage settlement names his prospective bride as Helen;⁷⁸ so too do the denization (naturalization) papers issued just before her marriage and so does Walter’s will.⁷⁹ In formal usage, therefore, she does not seem to have been known as Elinor. Only on the portrait, on whose authenticity some doubt has been cast,⁸⁰ and in the parish registers at her burial, does the name appear as Elinor.⁸¹ She may well have been so known to her friends and family, but would she, in a formal age, have allowed her pet name to appear in an item on public display? Should we perhaps wonder whether the initials W, E, H refer to the Jones family at all, or should this identification be regarded as a piece of later family mythology, or even a later reweaving?

It should also be noted that none of the other large hangings that, because of their probable date, might have been in the house from around 1612 (and are still there) could have been bought at Barcheston. The three pieces showing episodes from the *Life of Jacob* in the Fettiplace Room and the three *Planetary Gods* in the Sheldon

⁷⁷ In the first and the third Judah tapestries. Because they were sold soon after discovery, there would have been no way to check such details.

⁷⁸ ORO, E/24/5/D/1.

⁷⁹ *Cal Pat Rolls 1572-75*, no. 666, 15 June, 1573; TNA PROB 11/162.

⁸⁰ *Chastleton House*, National Trust 1997, p.8.

⁸¹ Chastleton Parish Register transcripts, ORO, sv anno 1638.

chamber are clearly of continental origin.⁸² None is technically arras – ie containing gold or silver thread - as the inventory described them. None matches the dimensions of the chambers. If indeed they have been on the premises since 1612, there is a reasonable probability that Jones, moving from a smaller house in Worcester to a larger property in the country, either bought ‘off-the-peg’ models or had recourse to the second-hand tapestry market. He could have purchased his other six tapestries, in an idiom also of continental origin, in the same way.

It is a further assumption that the tapestries still in the house can be equated with those mentioned, but not specifically titled, in the 1633 inventory. But it is much less clear that the *Judah and Tamar* and the *Judgement of Paris* hangings should be regarded as five of the six pieces of arras then listed in the Middle Chamber. They are not identified by name in the inventory, and they are not arras as it stated; the original dimensions of one surviving piece are uncertain, and nothing is known about the lost sixth piece. The present dimensions of the five pieces far exceed the presently available wall space. If, however, the utility rooms lying between the Middle and the Sheldon Chambers, created in the nineteenth century, reduced the Middle Chamber’s original size, the tapestries as we know them would have been inadequate. Finally, their value, at £2 10s each, is very low; in fact, they are the cheapest in the house. That they might be the five listed in the room in the 1738 inventory is perfectly possible, but it reveals nothing about their acquisition and weakens the link with Barcheston.⁸³ The lack of clear evidence that they were the tapestries of 1633 leaves open the possibility of later acquisition; three other tapestries, of later date, were in the house in 1919.⁸⁴

⁸² G. Wingfield-Digby, *Catalogue of Tapestries* 1980, no.47, for the Planetary Gods; National Trust Guide, *Chastleton*, p.21, for Life of Jacob as Enghien products. The 1633 inventory describes all the hangings as arras, not, as would be correct, tapestry. See T. P. Campbell, ‘Problems of Terminology’, *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, vol 3, 1995-96, pp. 29- 50.

⁸³ *Chastleton House*, National Trust 1997, p.25, 55. The Whitmore-Jones diaries, still in the house, indicate that some work was done in the room, but do not make it clear exactly what. Modern surveys have not elucidated the point. The 1738 Inventory, unpublished, is ORO, E/24/1/F2/3.

⁸⁴ Tapestries listed by Whitmore-Jones, 1909 included *Jacob, Asia*, a *Marriage Feast*, the initialled pieces and the *Planetary Gods*. In *Country Life* February 1920, p. 118 *Asia* seems to have turned into the *Tea Party*, while the Teniers tapestry was entitled

Nothing thus remains to support the assumptions of the 1920s which underpinned the attribution of the five large and three smaller tapestries to Barcheston. Neither proximity of residence nor close friendship can be demonstrated, and there is doubt over the original initials – all serious challenges to the confident and long-standing attribution of these tapestries to the Sheldon works. The quality of materials, design and execution is poor, well below that of the more complicated *Maps*. While tapestries called ‘Sheldon’ cannot be ranked alongside the finest, these examples are amongst the least accomplished in that corpus, only some part of which can be ascribed to their neglected condition. Not only is the theme unique in the Sheldon repertoire, but so too are the borders. Similarly, few of the species of flower portrayed, or their stylistic presentation, are commonly repeated in other ‘Sheldon’ floral tapestries. The brief fashion for tapestries based on texts from Ovid and Virgil, citing the book from which the scene was taken, which appears in Germany only slightly earlier, has never previously been noticed.⁸⁵ Nor has the existence of a possible model.

In the context of what is now known about Jones’s life, the tapestry showing his arms also produces different answers. Like the *Judgement of Paris* and the *Judah and Tamar* tapestries, its pattern is not found elsewhere in the Sheldon repertoire, but harks back to Brussels production in the middle years of the sixteenth century. A grant of 1602 allowed Jones a crest, but the phraseology shows that his right to arms had already been accepted. Elinor’s arms are fictitious, her own family having none.⁸⁶ Since Jones was exercising his right to arms before 1602, and the tapestry shows no crest, it could have been woven at any time after Jones’s marriage in 1573. That would fit what we have already learned about his life, but makes it far less certain that, on the basis of assumed friendship with Sheldon, the tapestry can safely be attributed to the Barcheston looms. At the time when Jones was prospering sufficiently to feel that he required arms, the contacts of his new, wealthy and well-

the *Marriage Feast*. All the Sheldon tapestries went briefly to the V&A, VAAR MA/1/W/1719; the ‘tea party’, illustrated, Sotheby’s 12 November 1920, lot 133. Nine C17 fragments were sold Sotheby’s London, 18 February 1921.

⁸⁵ Goebel, *Wandeteppiche*, vol III, i, p.185, figs 163a, b.

⁸⁶ British Library, Add Ms 5524, fo 206; Elinor’s arms were ‘borrowed’ from those of a Pope family; the chevrons now display two different tinctures.

connected German in-laws might very naturally have taken him to the London markets and to the hitherto-unknown Flemish émigré workshops. Certainly his links to London were then, as later, closer than his links to areas nearer Barcheston. The picture at Barcheston too now differs from that presented in the 1920s.

Barcheston : the documentary evidence

Little other than antiquarian hearsay underlay the earliest comments offered in the twentieth century on Barcheston and the Sheldon looms. Barnard's investigation widened the search for material and he used his archival skills to explore fresh evidence. He began, however, with Sheldon's will,⁸⁷ which he transcribed afresh and in full where it concerned tapestry matters; the older paraphrase used by Humphreys was found to be incorrect in several respects. The will laid out the very specific terms on which Sheldon intended to assist tapestry weavers – both English and 'stranger' (the Elizabethan legal term for those born overseas).

Barnard, however, had little time for the older belief that William Sheldon had made use of Flemish labour. He made clear that Anthony Wood (1632-95) had written that Hyckes had been sent abroad by *Ralph*, not by William, Sheldon, an important correction to an already frequent – and still repeated - misquotation, returning to manage Sheldon's enterprise, probably around 1561. He suggested that Hyckes had acted as Ralph's tutor on the travels abroad mentioned in the epitaph. He then made an attempt to identify Richard Hyckes as a Worcestershire man, a view which has been shown elsewhere to be improbable. It is far more likely that Hyckes was a Flemish immigrant who anglicized his name, perhaps from Van der Hecke or Huygens.⁸⁸ Aged around 40 when first found associated with Sheldon – rather old to have served a recent apprenticeship – he was probably a master weaver. Barnard took literally both the statement in William's near-contemporary epitaph that Sheldon introduced the art of tapestry weaving, and Sheldon's own sentence in the will that

⁸⁷ *Archaeologia* 78, pp.356-7; TNA PROB 11/53, on-line at http://www.tapestriescaledsheldon.info/p33_learn_ws_will.htm

⁸⁸ H. L. Turner, 'Finding the Sheldon Weavers; Richard Hyckes and the Sheldon tapestry works', *Textile History*, 33 (2), November 2002, pp. 137-161. http://www.tapestriescaledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP35BIOGRichard_Hyckes.pdf He was buried, aged 97, in 1621, Barcheston Parish Registers, WaCRO DR 005/1.

Richard Hyckes was ‘the only author and beginner of this art within this realm’. The latter, which might be no more than a fulsome compliment whose meaning neither Elizabethan party would have taken at face value, is now recognizable as a phrase linked with other émigré artisans, or ‘strangers’, seeking refuge from the wars of Philip II of Spain across their homeland and setting up in business to practise skills unknown in England.⁸⁹

Offering support to such refugees would be a practice clearly in keeping with Elizabethan policy in the 1560s, when the government encouraged continental craftsmen with specialist skills to settle, and when English craftsmen did not commonly travel, or train, abroad. Sheldon was not the first to become involved with such men. Piers Butler, Earl of Ormond, is said to have settled Flemish weavers at Kilkenny in 1539 to make tapestry, diaper and Turkish carpets;⁹⁰ Protector Somerset temporarily established cloth weavers in the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey in 1548;⁹¹ an outline plan for a dye works in Southwark run by a Fleming was drawn up in 1552;⁹² in the late 1560s Queen Elizabeth’s Secretary, William Cecil, planned a weavers’ colony at Stamford, Lincolnshire, with unknown success.⁹³ Neither a man named Jois Arysmake, nor an invitation to a foreign tapestry weaver, would have surprised an Elizabethan.⁹⁴ But Barnard, like Thomson before him, did not choose to realize the extent of the already long-standing Flemish involvement in tapestry weaving, as in other crafts, in England.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1582-83, no 867, licence to the Queen’s trumpeter, George Langdale, sole maker of trumpets and sackbut ‘whereof he has been the first deviser and maker within this our realm of England’. C66/1231, m.22.

⁹⁰ BLib Add Ms 4752 f.258/280 in ink; Rev. J. Graves, ‘Ancient Tapestry of Kilkenny Castle’, *Transactions of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society*, ii 1852-53, pp.3-9.

⁹¹ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic 1547-53*, nos. 572-79, 585-87, 596-98, 767.

⁹² R.H. Tawney and E. Power, *Tudor Economic Documents*, 3 volumes, London, 1924, ii, p.82.

⁹³ J. Thirsk, ‘Stamford in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries’ in A. Rogers, ed., *The Making of Stamford*, Leicester, 1965, pp. 43, 64-65.

⁹⁴ Jois Arysmake, Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, ii, p. 301.

⁹⁵ Thomson’s view that the Wardrobe weavers were English (*History of Tapestry*, 1906) p. 262, may have been based on the list of Tailors not weavers, TNA E315/46 fo 47; his view was incorrect but still weighed heavily on opinions.

Sheldon's plan developed in two stages. In January 1570 his initial intention was to offer loans. They were to be available, at differential rates, both to Englishmen and to strangers who had been, were already, or would in the future be, work for either Richard Hyckes, Thomas Chaunce or William Dowler, Hyckes' 'servant' (his apprentice or journeyman). Englishmen could borrow £20, a stranger 20 marks (£13 6s 8d). Barnard did not grasp the legal connotations of the word 'stranger'. He could not therefore explain the significance of the differing levels of the loans. He also failed to understand the implications of Sheldon's terms, namely that the strangers, already trained, were integral, indeed essential participants at least at the start of William's scheme, needed to teach their skills to those living in a country where there was no tapestry weaving industry. Funded from the market tolls of the newly created borough of Bishop's Castle, the loans were to be awarded on the basis of longest service and had to be repaid within ten years. Barnard never satisfactorily explained their purpose despite noting Sheldon's clear statement that he hoped to train youth. His subsequent aim would have been to enable trained men to set up for themselves, hence the loans to be used as set-up capital, in a trade whose products he saw to be in demand, and to pay for which large sums of money were disbursed to foreign manufacturers. The immediate example of such investment was that of his father-in-law, who had entrusted £80 to the burgesses of Warwick to invest, the interest to be used for loans to young entrepreneurs; two Coventry merchants did the same.⁹⁶ Possibly in the knowledge of those bequests, and certainly familiar with similar efforts in which he himself was involved, the Earl of Leicester rebuked Warwick's wheedling town clerk that 'he merveilled they had not set up a scheme like Sheldon's'.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ T. Kemp, *Black Book of Warwick*, 1899, pp.314-18. However, Willington's will makes no reference to this bequest, TNA PROB 11/42B. Huband's will is TNA PROB 11/66; the towns he proposed should benefit were Coventry, Hereford, Leominster, Stratford on Avon, Henley in Arden, Warwick and Kenilworth; his executor was the earl of Leicester.

⁹⁷ Kemp, *Black Book*, pp. 47-49. An alternative explanation of this remark is that the earl was remembering his own (rejected) offer of loans to the impoverished workers of Beverley; the suggestion he made for Warwick was the making of cloth and caps, one of the town's earlier industries.

Nine months later Hyckes was allowed the use of the family's house at Barcheston, rent free, provided he wove not only arras and tapestry, but also 'moccadoes, carolles, plometts, grograynes, sayes and sarges', a range of fabrics from coarse to fine, all those in which Flemish, rather than English, weavers specialized. The skills sought in Sheldon's will very exactly match those requested in the invitations to settlement issued to strangers by the corporations of Sandwich, Maidstone, Canterbury, Colchester and Norwich and by William Cecil for Stamford.⁹⁸ The phrases in the latter were almost formulaic, and included, as Sheldon also did, provision of the means of subsistence. In every respect, Sheldon's plans for his project and the phraseology of the will so closely resemble the conditions under which those urban settlements were established that it cannot be chance. Nevertheless, the implications of introducing into the once prospering manufacturing region between Coventry and Gloucester techniques of weaving new and different woollen fabrics were never mentioned and remain unexplored. The fact that the techniques were familiar to strangers rather than Englishmen is also passed over. Given that only one aspect of Sheldon's plans – tapestry weaving – has been examined is it possible that Sheldon's efforts should be seen as little more than another attempt to found a cloth-weaving colony of strangers, similar to those in the towns?

The revision of the earlier transcription of Sheldon's will brought a further, more startling, consequence. A corrected reading replaced the place-name Baddisley with Bordesley. Baddisley, previously assumed to be Baddisley Clinton, Warwickshire, was not a family possession and had no links to the Sheldon family; it had no obvious significance. Bordesley, however, close to Sheldon's house at Beoley, Worcestershire, took on enormous import, largely on the grounds of proximity. On the strength of three words in the will, Barnard suggested that a second workshop had

⁹⁸ *The New Draperies in the Low Countries and England*, ed. N.B.Harte, Oxford, 1997; V. Morant, 'The Settlement of Protestant Refugees in Maidstone during the sixteenth century', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, iv (1951), 211-217; *Cal Pat Rolls 1566-69*, no. 347; for Sandwich, *Cal Pat Rolls 1560-63*, p.336; *Cal State Papers Domestic*, 1547-1580, (hereafter CSPD) 293. 296, printed in full by M. Le Baron Kervyn de Lettenhove, *Collections de Chroniques Belges Inédits*, vol 23, Brussels, *Relations Politiques des Pays Bas et Angleterre sous le règne de Philippe II*, vols iii, 1885, 476-77; iv, 1886, 717-719. See also <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/Emigreweavers.pdf>

been established there, coterminous with Barcheston.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, in support of his view, Barnard could find only a single weaver, Henry Wells. Listed amongst those employed in the Great Wardrobe, he was linked by Barnard, on assumption alone, to Bordesley. Barnard's suggestions are hard to substantiate. Bordesley was neither house, village nor parish, but the site of a Cistercian abbey, dissolved at the Reformation. In 1540 most of the stone from the walls was sold, together with the lead and timber from the roofs; only a chapel and the gatehouse remained. In 1542 the site passed from the king to the Windsor family and, in the second half of the century, was used for metal smelting.¹⁰⁰ The Sheldons owned no property there. Moreover, in a 70-year period (1558–1631) there are only eleven wills of men describing themselves as being 'of Bordesley in Tardebig'; the only weaver among them was dead by 1558.¹⁰¹ However, because Thomas Chaunce, one of the early associates named in Sheldon's will, chose in 1571 to describe himself as 'of Bordesley' the epithet was thought to support Barnard's claim. No evidence to show his connection with the place can be found, and Chaunce moved away almost immediately after he appears. Contrary to Barnard's view that the Bordesley workshop was established after 1568, it seems more probable that it ceased to function round that time. In December 1568 Sir John Talbot's commission to Hyckes to weave his arms was executed at Barcheston, twice the distance from Talbot's house near Bromsgrove to Bordesley for his servants to ride.¹⁰² Moreover, Barcheston was the place where Hyckes and other weavers already lived. It had become Sheldon's property in 1564, not, as previously thought, by inheritance in 1561.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ *Archaeologia* 78, pp. 261-62. No antiquarian history of either Warwickshire or Worcestershire records any tapestry weaving activity in the area.

¹⁰⁰ P. Rahtz, *Excavations at Bordesley Abbey*, British Archaeological Reports, vol. xxiii, Oxford, 1976, pp.2-23.

¹⁰¹ E.A.Fry, ed., *Worcester Wills*, British Record Society, vols. xxxi, xxxix, London, 1904, 1910, collective entry under place name.

¹⁰² H. L. Turner, 'Finding the Sheldon Weavers', p.144.

¹⁰³ Rees Price, 'William Willington of Barcheston: a 16th century Warwickshire Woolstapler', *Evesham Journal*, 12 Jan-9 February 1924. H. L. Turner, 'Finding the Sheldon Weavers', p.149, based on documents in Warwick Record Office, CR 580 9/38, 14/1-20, 580/15, CR 580/16, CR 580/17/1, 5. Summarized at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=187-cr580&cid=1-2-6#1-2-6>

If tapestry weaving ever did take place at Bordesley it is likely to have been ephemeral, possibly linked, as Barnard himself suggested, only to the weaving of those tapestries that Sheldon stipulated in his will should remain at Beoley ‘from heyre to heyre’. They could only have been woven by strangers, and that the team was dispersing is suggested by Sheldon’s declaration that he had already disbursed money to some. The hypothesis that there was such a commission makes sense of the provisions of the will in ways that the earlier interpretation did not. Sheldon, tireless servant of four Tudor sovereigns in county administration, would have known of the initiatives to introduce new skills into depressed areas. Appreciating the advantages, he adopted their phraseology and copied their basis. The premises provided for Hyckes gave the master weaver a base; offering start-up capital after completion of an apprenticeship formed an inducement to local men to take up a new trade. Both provisions linked with Sheldon’s second concern – prevention of the drain of capital abroad in payment for luxury goods which could as easily be made in England, once the skills had been acquired. And the problem of a skills deficit was a problem which had long engaged the Tudor chattering classes.¹⁰⁴

It passed un-noticed in the 1920s that the will specifically limited the period for which the profits of the market tolls were available – until they passed to Sheldon’s grandson, Edmund Plowden, when he reached the age of 24. That would have been in 1587, a date that must have been known to his grandfather, but almost impossible for Barnard to discover amongst uncatalogued documents.¹⁰⁵ The funds were almost certainly of very limited value; even in 1831 Bishop’s Castle had a population of only 1818 and, on no main road, was never a flourishing centre of trade.¹⁰⁶ Whether Sheldon’s proposition was practical, and whether Hyckes could obtain supplies or attract customers when he was more than three days’ riding from London, England’s consumer capital, are matters never discussed.

¹⁰⁴ Sir Thomas Smith, *A Discourse of the Common Weal of this Realm of England*, ed E. Lamond, Cambridge 1908, pp.63-4

¹⁰⁵ Edmund Plowden junior was aged 22 when his father died 6.2.1585 (TNA C142/206/13) and himself died in Aug 1587, aged 24, TNA, C142/221/123, P.W. Hasler, *House of Commons*, 1558-1603, London 1982.

¹⁰⁶ The population numbered 1818 in 1831, Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of England*, London 1831.

There is still no way even to guess how many men the loans could benefit or to estimate the level of take-up. Barnard could discover only six weavers at Barcheston; it is now possible to present a more detailed picture. The most interesting, because he is the only clearly identified stranger, is Henrick Camerman, ‘a bachiler, a man of xxix yeres, born in Bruxells, came into England in June 1564 to serve Mr Sheldon where he hath dwelled six yeres, the rest here [London]; he ys an arisworker’.¹⁰⁷ Exactly where he was employed by Mr Sheldon is not recorded, but wherever it was his age indicates that he can only just have been out of his apprenticeship when he came to England, perhaps with his master, Hyckes. There may have been others. William Dowler, permitted to borrow double the normal allowance to strangers, was already a journeyman, probably a stranger. He stayed near Barcheston; his son later entered service in the Wardrobe. Another of Hyckes’s apprentices in the late 1560s may also have been Flemish: Henry Geerts, aged 27, had the experience to go to the Great Wardrobe in 1570. Apart from Peter the Docheman, buried at Barcheston in 1590 and assumed, but not known, to be a weaver, these are the only men who might have come with Hyckes and formed the original team. Three other early apprentices were probably English: Richard Cattell, who entered the Wardrobe in 1577, aged 24, and William and Thomas Willey, who stayed in Shipston.¹⁰⁸ Six later recruits certainly all had local ties and all left Barcheston aged around 22 for employment in the Great Wardrobe in London. One, Ralph Canning, succeeded Hyckes as its head.¹⁰⁹ Of course there could have been others of whom there is no trace, just as there is no further indication of Flemish weavers. There is,

¹⁰⁷ Wendy Hefford, ‘Flemish Tapestry Weavers in England: 1550-1775’, in *Flemish Tapestry Weavers Abroad*, ed. Guy Delmarcel, Leuven University Press, 2002, pp. 43-61. Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, vol. ii, p. 88.

¹⁰⁸ For Thomas and William Willey see H.L. Turner, ‘Finding the weavers’, pp. 146-47 together with John Higgins, Humphrey Hill, and possibly John Pattriket, J. Jones, ed., *Stratford upon Avon Inventories*, Dugdale Society, 39, 2002. no. 46, pp. 82-3; Cattell and others later went to the Wardrobe - <http://www.tapestriescaledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre1GtWardrobe.pdf>

¹⁰⁹ Ralph Canning’s appointment, LC 5/50, 198-200; William Alforde, Anthony Diston, Simon Mumford and William Huckvale, also had local connections; see <http://www.tapestriescaledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre1GtWardrobe.pdf> archived at <http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20110425060114/http://www.tapestriescaledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre1GtWardrobe.pdf>

however, a clear pattern to Hyckes' activities over the (hypothetical) period (1564-1611) during which Barcheston functioned. He accepted apprentices, fulfilling Sheldon's aims and enabling men to earn a living, but he could not offer local employment, with the result that his apprentices went to London. Their presence there casts doubt on the 1920s' interpretation that Barcheston was a commercial venture.

The ease, and indeed regularity, with which Hyckes' apprentices could enter the Queen's service can now be explained. Barnard, contending with the difficulties of locating material in the Public Record Office, many of its most important records barely catalogued, while ecclesiastical and family archives were still in local ownership, not then deposited in county record offices, was left with a number of puzzles he could not solve. One was that Richard Hyckes appeared to serve only four years (1584-88) as the Queen's arras maker, though as early as 1576 he had referred to himself as being in that post, effectively head of the royal conservation department.¹¹⁰ Publication of the Patent Rolls reveals that Richard was designated as its next head in January 1569, a year before the opportunities at Barcheston were formalized. The post became his from Michaelmas 1570. Though given the right to appoint deputies to execute many of his duties, the Wardrobe accounts show he was employed there throughout the 1570s while also being free to work at Barcheston;¹¹¹ conversely, however, the salary attached to the royal appointment made him independent of the fortunes of the Barcheston venture. In 1575, a second grant associated his son Francis in survivorship, and permitted Richard, like his predecessors, to have a workshop for his own profit.¹¹² But while his predecessors had been permitted to employ six journeymen born abroad (that is, skilled weavers), the

¹¹⁰ *Archaeologia* 78, p. 264; TNA, LC 9/66.

¹¹¹ *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1566-69, no.2573, TNA C 66/1060, m.7. See also H.L.Turner, 'Working Arras and Arras Workers : Conservation in the Great Wardrobe under Elizabeth I', *Textile History*, 42(2), May 2012. See also: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110622142122/http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php?title=Arras_Men_and_Tapestry_conservation_under_Elizabeth_I_1559-1603_-_Introduction

¹¹² *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1572-1575*, no. 3268, TNA C 66/1136, m.16. For John Musting (Jan Moestincke) *Letters and Papers Henry VIII*, 1537, 2 vols, part I, no.795, (no.22), TNA C 66/671, m.9; *Letters and Papers 1540-41*, no.1488, (no.2), TNA C 66/705, m.25; John Bukke, *Letters and Papers, 1545*, part 2, no.1068, (no.23); Cornelis Mustinge, *Letters and papers Henry VIII*, 1546, no.1165, (no.15), TNA C 66/790, m.1.

six men Hyckes was allowed to employ had to be born in England. The grant sounds like legal confirmation for Hyckes' continuing activities in England, the equivalent of denization (naturalization). Since Sheldon did not set out specifically to create a workshop, but only to provide the means for someone else to do so, it seems possible that this permission may represent 'the Sheldon workshop' of the 1920s rather than a separate venture. Either way, the restriction to English employees, placed on numerous other stranger craftsmen bringing new skills into the kingdom, implied the obligation, and the need, to train his workforce.¹¹³

Why Hyckes decided to take up his royal duties only in 1584, and why he decided to hand over to his son in 1588, when Francis was only 22 and, presumably, having attended Oxford University, still serving an apprenticeship, remains a mystery. It might perhaps be explained by the fact that money from the loans would come to an end in 1587. Maybe Hyckes felt it expedient to establish his claim to the headship of the royal repair shop, and the attendant fees, instead of leaving its management to deputies as he had previously done. Father and son served until 1609.¹¹⁴

Despite knowing of that appointment, albeit only from 1584, despite publishing the names of the Wardrobe weavers, a 'preponderance' of them claimed as Worcestershire men despite obviously Flemish names,¹¹⁵ and despite the identification and acceptance of foreign craftsmen by students of other disciplines,¹¹⁶

¹¹³ A. M. Hind, *Engraving in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, Cambridge 1952; on glass workers, Eleanor S. Godfrey, *The Development of English Glassmaking, 1560-1640*, Oxford 1975, p. 20. Benno M. Forman, 'Continental Furniture Craftsmen in London 1511-1625', *Furniture History*, vii, 1971, pp. 94-120.

¹¹⁴ *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1572-1575*, no. 3269, TNA C66/1060, m.7, verso.

¹¹⁵ D.T.B.Wood's notes do not seem to have been published in full; they were referred to by Humphreys, *Archaeologia* 74, p.186 and A.F.Kendrick, 'Some Barcheston Tapestries', *Walpole Society*, xiv, 1925-26, pp.27-42, esp.p.33, n.2 and *Archaeologia* 78, p.281-86. Barnard's diaries, the timing of his activities very precisely noted, leave little doubt that he cannot himself have studied the Wardrobe accounts. The series is near continuous 1559-1639, see n. 111. Barnard's views on English weavers are summarized in a letter to the *Birmingham Post*, 27 March 1939.

¹¹⁶ As carpenters, E.M. Jourdain, *English Decoration and Furniture of the early Renaissance (1500-1650)*, London, 1924; as silversmiths, W.W.Watts, *Old English Silver*, London, 1924; as artists Lionel Cust, 'Foreign Artists', *Procs of Huguenot Society*, vol. vii, no.1, 1903, 45-82.

Barnard, like Thomson before him, did not consult the records relating to the stranger settlers in London for the period 1510-1600. Transcribed, indexed and in print from 1900, this gap in the evidence was first noticed only in 2000 by Wendy Hefford.¹¹⁷ Barnard knew nothing of Henrick Camerman; neither did he ever find out that Henry Wells, whom he had vaguely supposed to be an unrecorded member of a Worcestershire family living at Bordesley, was, as Welche or Welles, one of the older weavers in the Great Wardrobe, born in the dominions of the Bishop of Liège (modern Belgium).¹¹⁸ The denization records – the naturalization papers of strangers who wished to settle and to do so legally – were also in print and would have provided some further background for other émigré weavers living in London.¹¹⁹

Examination of these records shows that at least 110 stranger tapestry weavers were resident in London in the years 1559 to 1619. The records are incomplete, however, and it is very possible that the figure should be nearly doubled. For the majority of those listed we know no more than their names. Seventy found employment for longer or shorter periods repairing Queen Elizabeth's tapestries. For thirty-seven men their birthplace is known: nineteen came from Brussels, eleven from Oudenarde, three from Bruges and one each from Aelst, Diest, Emden and Ypres. For some twenty of the known names it is possible to construct a short biography because they appear and reappear in tax and civil documents.¹²⁰ Weavers arrived at different ages and with differing lengths of experience behind them; some had clearly been masters and had thought it worthwhile to start again in a more peaceful land. Three are known from continental records: Denijs van Alsloot, Gilleis Stiegelbaut and Adrian Happart. The last two suffered severe losses in the siege of Oudenarde;

¹¹⁷ Wendy Hefford, 'Flemish Tapestry Weavers in England:1550-1775', pp. 43-61. Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*.

¹¹⁸ Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, ii, p.87.

¹¹⁹ W. Page, *Aliens in England 1509-1603. Letters of Denization and Acts of Naturalization*, (Huguenot Society of London, Quarto Series, vol. 8) London, 1893.

¹²⁰ <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre1GtWardrobe.pdf> discussed at <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/Emigrewweavers.pdf> archived at <http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20110425060040/http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/index.html>

Stiegelbaut returned to his home town only to suffer further troubles ten years later.¹²¹ Happart possibly,¹²² and van Alsloot certainly, remained in London. Van Alsloot found a post in the household of the Earl of Sussex, for whom he executed a commission abroad, acting also as Richard Hyckes' deputy in the Wardrobe from 1579 to 1583, the year in which the earl died and van Alsloot's future became less certain. Nevertheless, his contact with the English aristocracy seems to have survived until the early years of the seventeenth century.¹²³ Another man – Michael Makaerd of Aelst, also listed as Michael Otes – followed a similar path in the household of the Earl of Pembroke, apparently until his death.¹²⁴

The successive appearance of the names of the same weavers over a period of years in a range of documents suggests that they were making a living, and so must be assumed to have set up workshops. The two clearest examples are specifically identified in the damaged and now-incomplete census of 1593, which sought to discover how many strangers employed Englishmen: Margaret Knutte employed one stranger servant and two Englishmen, and Joyce Offield had four Englishmen. Margaret was the second wife of John Gnudd, or Knodd, from Oudenarde. He is first

¹²¹ A. Pinchart, *Histoire Generale de la Tapisserie*, Pays Bas, Paris, 1878-85, pp. 100-101; Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, iii, 380; Donnet, 'Les Tapisseries de Bruxelles, Enghien et Audenarde pendant la Furie Espagnole', *Annales de la Societe Royale d'Archeologie de Bruxelles*, vol.9, p.450, *ibid* vol.10, p.301-2.

¹²² A. Pinchart, *Histoire Generale de la Tapisserie*, Paris, 1878-85, pp. 100-101; Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, i, 375, iii, 387 ii,163, *Kerkerads-protocollen der Hollandische Gemeente te Londen, 1569-1571* (Resolutions of the Council of the Dutch Church in London 1569-1571), ed A.Kuyper in publications of the Marnix Society, series I, part I, Utrecht 1870; A.J. Jelsma and O. Boersma, *Acta von het Consistorie van de Nederlandse gemeente te Londen 1569-1585*, 's-Gravenhage 1993, henceforth Jelsma + number, 614, 894, 1333, 1335, 1468; Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, ii, 88, 89; Jelsma, 1512, 1525, 3080 18.8.1583; W. J.C.Moens, *The marriage, baptismal and burial registers 1571-1874 of the Dutch Church of London*, Lymington, 1884, 3 September 1583.

¹²³ Willem Schrickx, 'Denijs van Alsloot en Willem Tons in London in 1577', *Artes Textiles*, Ghent, viii,1974, 47-64; C. Maeyer, 'Denijs van Alsloot (voor ca 1573 - 1625) en de Tapijtkunst', *Artes Textiles*, 1, 1953, 3-11. See <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre1GtWardrobe.pdf>

¹²⁴ Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, ii, 299, ii, 386 (as Hoots); TNA, LC 9/66-79; LC 9/76; Jelsma, app. iv, p.797; v, p.801; Guildhall, Commissary Court, Registers, vol.17, f 224; Act Books vol. 14, f.181. <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre1GtWardrobe.pdf>

recorded amongst the large influx of men who arrived in 1567/8 as living with other arrasworkers, also from Oudenarde, and he must have died around 1590. She had arrived only in 1585, and was perhaps trying to keep the workshop running for the sake of his eldest son.¹²⁵ Offield arrived in London from Bruges in 1572, applied for and received denization papers in 1582 and was still living in 1619.¹²⁶ His son was employed in the Wardrobe from 1606 until at least 1633, one of the few weavers' sons to live long enough to follow his father's craft.¹²⁷

The careers of others were more varied: Anthony van der Vynnen and Henry Wells were both recorded briefly as Wardrobe employees and returned as its managers, deputies for Richard Hyckes, between 1570 and 1574.¹²⁸ Able to supply the necessary materials, they had presumably worked independently in the interval. Anthony van der Meulen – known to the English as FrumtheMill and noted as a coverlet maker – enjoyed both worlds, holding a Wardrobe job for nearly thirty years and, for fifteen of them, running his own workshop in Southwark. As his will reveals, he prospered: his cash bequests total £118, in addition to the household goods.¹²⁹ His contemporary John Soillot from Brussels – who arrived not only with his two sons (one born in Brussels, the other in Antwerp), but with his apprentice and his pattern book – seems not to have achieved his ambitions for an independent workshop. After twenty-one years in the Wardrobe, he was ordained a minister and served in various communities in England; nevertheless, his will left nearly £70 between his obviously difficult third wife and his married daughter, while his pattern book was to be divided between Severin Moestincke and John Gellot – possibly Soillot's cousin and Moestincke's partner in a workshop.¹³⁰ More successful by a long way was a former colleague, Arnold Baerd, long-time resident in England, who had also worked in the

¹²⁵ <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre2Independents.pdf>

¹²⁶ <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre2Independents.pdf>

¹²⁷ <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre1GtWardrobe.pdf>

¹²⁸ <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre1GtWardrobe.pdf>
LC9/59-84; Scouloudi, *Returns*, no. 492; Moens; denization in Page, *Denizations*, 141; taxed, Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, ii, 183, 291, 422, 446; will

¹²⁹ London Metropolitan Archive (LMA), Surrey Probate Records, DW/PA/5/1593/204.

¹³⁰ <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre1GtWardrobe.pdf>

Wardrobe before setting up for himself. He not only made provision for his father and for his widow, but also left £300 to his son.¹³¹ We have already met the team from Brussels found as residents of Broad Street for at least five years from 1583.¹³² Another weaver, whose behaviour indicates an independent cast of mind and illuminates the mixed motives for emigration, was Morysius van der Hove from Diest; his Anabaptist leanings worried the Church elders for several years.¹³³ But even if, in many cases, we have little more than their names, the weavers clearly survived and the assumption must be that they found employment; their fortunes are reflected in the areas they chose to live, for they inhabited both wealthy and impoverished districts of the City of London.

One of the most interesting men, because his career resembles that of Hyckes, is Peter Wallys from Ypres, employed by the Governors of Christ's Hospital, London's orphanage, to train such boys as were suitable as tapestry weavers. His contract stated that he would take two boys every four years over a period of sixteen years, in return for a room at the Hospital and, later, for a house of his own.¹³⁴ Each apprentice had to work a further eight years for him at the end of his apprenticeship. Effectively therefore, he acquired a workshop. Two of his apprentices, beneficiaries of his will, were subsequently employed in the Great Wardrobe for nearly forty years.¹³⁵

¹³¹ <http://www.tapestriescaledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre2Independents.pdf>

¹³² Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, ii, 318,325, Nicholas Morrens and the following 9 names; Hefford in *Flemish Tapestry Weavers Abroad*, p. 48; John Droeshout, 'paynter', father of Martin (engraver of Shakespeare's portrait, see n. 36), lived close by, (Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, ii, 318) and was admitted as a new member of the Dutch Church at much the same time, 19 July - 4 November 1585 (Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, ii, 318, 387); John's death is unrecorded. He receives no mention in Hind, *Engraving*, ii, 341 or in *ODNB*; the latter has confused him with John Drussait of Scouloudi, no. 409.

¹³³ Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, ii, 93, iii, 382; Jelsma, nos. 999, 1004, 1071, 1081, 1115, 1117, 1123.

¹³⁴ <http://www.tapestriescaledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre2Independents.pdf>

¹³⁵ Thomas Austin and William Clay, <http://www.tapestriescaledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre1GtWardrobe.pdf> or <http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20110425060114/http://www.tapestriescaledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP39Emigre1GtWardrobe.pdf>

Few were as fortunate. Some idea of how the majority fared can be deduced from the nineteen surviving wills. Four record bequests only of goods and chattels. Fifteen others – some written by men about whom we know little else – range from totals of £16 17s 5d to £118.¹³⁶ Wardrobe workers, employed ‘at will’ (ie, on a casual basis) could, from the mid-1570s onwards, expect to receive an average wage of £10 10s per year for forty weeks’ employment, so the figures in the wills are enough to suggest an income above the subsistence level. But life was not so good for others. Although he had been in England for more than thirty years, Peter Peterson’s assets in 1621, his wages from the Prince’s Wardrobe, were only just enough to offset the monies he owed.¹³⁷ As a group, tapestry weavers do not seem to have prospered as much as some of the other craftsmen, perhaps because of the continued import of tapestries – even of the less valuable kind, including cushions – from the Low Countries revealed in the few surviving customs records, the Port Books.¹³⁸ Their comforts were few; the Consistory records reveal that, for many, the Church was the focus of their social life, shared with wives and friends from their homeland.¹³⁹ The documents are insufficient to allow reconstruction of the network of alliances, professional and personal, that supported them, but shadowy and incomplete though the evidence is, it is far from tenuous and there is more than enough to make it clear that Barcheston was not the only tapestry-producing centre in England. Some of the London workshops were in existence for at least twenty years, although their products

¹³⁶ Wills can be found in The National Archives for William Alford, Arnold Baerd, John Soillot (TNA PROB/11) and administrations for Ralph Canning and Joas Dowler in TNA PROB 6. London Commissary Court recorded those for Severin Mostincke, John Nightingale, Michael Ots, Peter Wallys, Henry Wells, John Willimets; and the London Archdeaconry Court recorded those for Harman Selott, Simon Mumford and Thomas White. Wills for Anthony van der Meulen and Peter Peterson are in LMA Surrey Probate records, for Richard Hyckes’ Worcester Record Office.

¹³⁷ Kirk and Kirk, *Aliens*, iii, 226; LMA, Surrey Probate Records, DW/PA/5/1621/98.

¹³⁸ A. Pettegree, ‘Thirty Years On’: progress towards integration amongst the immigrant population of Elizabethan London’, in *English Rural Society 1500-1800, Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk*, ed. J. Chartres and D. Hey, CUP, 1990, pp. 297-312. TNA, E 190/5/5; E 190/8/2; E 190/9/5; E 190/14/5; examined in greater detail in H.L. Turner, ‘The Tapestry Trade in Elizabethan London: Products, Purchasers and Purveyors’, forthcoming, *The London Journal*.

¹³⁹ A. Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in London*, Oxford, 1986, p.310-18.

remain unknown, as yet inseparable by any forensic tests from those labelled 'Sheldon'.

The implications are clear. Since there is evidence for production elsewhere, hitherto unknown, and since no document links the Chastleton tapestries to Barcheston, can the casual explanation of their origin, and the links that followed, still be accepted? Should a reassessment of the tapestries called Sheldon extend beyond the group found at Chastleton ?

The influence of the Chastleton discoveries on the image of the Sheldon tapestries

The finds from Chastleton described earlier played a further part in the reconstruction of the still familiar image of the Sheldon style. Their discovery and the 'recognition' of an English tapestry workshop generated great excitement, first amongst dealers and then in the public mind. Replica weavings of smaller pieces were offered for sale, and painted reproductions commissioned.¹⁴⁰ Such enthusiasm, however, created a problem. The more widely the tag 'Sheldon' was bestowed, the less significance it carried and the less coherent its image became. It was to damn the flood of ill-founded claims, many of them chronologically impossible, that Wace undertook the task of establishing criteria by which Sheldon tapestries might be recognized.¹⁴¹ In the absence of any related documents he found his yardstick by nominal use of characteristics in the 'practically certain' Barcheston products, the *Maps*, and in heavier dependence on the larger tapestries described above; he decided it was 'reasonable to assume' that the then available historical evidence sufficed to link Jones, Sheldon and Barcheston.

Wace then followed up two older ideas. The first, propounded in 1916, considered that Sir William Burrell's *Faith, Hope and Charity*, in which each figure is

¹⁴⁰ *Old Furniture* 1928–9; Bodleian Library, Oxford, Library Records d.1135; unpaginated volume for references to makers of replicas, Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry, *Yorkshire Post* 23 July 1923; letters, Charles Grant, Designer of Screens, 17 November 1926; Wace to Dr Cowley, 11 July 1927; Vogue photoshoot: *Vogue*, 1927, 48, 80.

¹⁴¹ *Archaeologia* 78, pp. 287, 314.

framed by an arcade, might be English. Displayed at a public meeting in Glasgow, it had been labelled as being of Swiss origin.¹⁴² The examples shown to Wace after Humphreys' lecture in 1924 were almost consistently of this style. The initials T E I on a cushion depicting the *Flight into Egypt* associated with others showing the *Annunciation and the Adoration*, both enclosed within an arcade, albeit of unknown provenance, were interpreted as those of Walter Jones' son, Thomas.¹⁴³ Without even commenting on the absence of provenance, or on the possibility that 'T', not 'I', might represent the surname, Wace used the piece to establish the arcades as a characteristic of Sheldon style. The recently identified design source, by Wierix, does not suggest, or support, an exclusive link to Barcheston.¹⁴⁴

The second idea was Humphreys' attribution, without evidence, to Barcheston of two small pieces, the *Flight into Egypt* and *Christ and the Woman of Samaria* (both measuring 200mm by 280mm). Both were finely woven, containing a high percentage of silk and of metal thread.¹⁴⁵ To these Wace added three further examples, which, though depicting different scenes, were similar in that each was surrounded by an English inscription; in virtue of their use of inscriptions, colour, design and technique he associated them with the Chastleton finds and thus with the Barcheston venture. Overall, Wace claimed as characteristics of the Sheldon school the use of floral grounds, of hunting scenes in the horizontal borders, of barber-pole (striped) edging, of arcades enclosing the central subject, of masks and herm-like figures of initials and of inscriptions in English.¹⁴⁶

It was a fair summary of the stylistic traits of the pieces at his disposal. Nevertheless, it represented a radical shift in the previously projected image, focusing

¹⁴² VAAR, Howard file MA 1/ H 3018, letters 10 March and 14 March 1916.

¹⁴³ *Archaeologia* 78, p. 294, pictured E. A Standen, *European post-medieval Tapestries and Related Hangings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York 1997, vol 2, no 119 and its companion piece http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/p18_creating_ft_egypt.htm

¹⁴⁴ Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration*, pp. 229-30.

¹⁴⁵ *Archaeologia* 74, p. 200. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O317800/cushion-cover/>

¹⁴⁶ http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/p17_creating_df_style.htm based on *Archaeologia* 78, pp. 298-99.

on smaller products rather than large-sized examples. Wace was aware that his three groupings – tapestries with floral ground, with arcades and the very small pieces – did not always sit happily with the previous attributions about which he expressed considerable reservations, for example the valance,¹⁴⁷ the *Four Seasons* at Hatfield House and a floral hanging now at Sudeley, all usually understood by his readers as ‘Sheldon’ products. He also limited the lifetime of the workshop to 1611; Humphreys had maintained, on the basis of inaccurate heraldry identified in the Warwickshire tapestry map, that it extended into the mid-seventeenth century. Wace’s criteria remain the basis for classification even though his links were always tenuous and dependent on accepting assumptions that no longer look soundly based. His insistently cautious assessment was soon abbreviated and turned into certainty by the limited space of exhibition labels in four major exhibitions held soon after his publication.¹⁴⁸ Consequent familiarity with only outline comments has conferred authority, but even at the time Wace’s conclusions were questioned. Elinor Sachs commented on their dependence on assumption and association; Goebel’s appreciative, but not uncritical, review was later belied by the fuller comments in his *Wandteppiche*.¹⁴⁹

Wace’s approach was born of necessity for he had none of the conventional dating tools. Only a written contract can certainly define a tapestry’s origin; a city mark indicates a place, usually reliably, while a monogram may identify a master weaver. Any two can categorize a style, creating the means for attribution by analogy. Humphreys’ use of coats of arms or initials in conjunction with proximity of owners to (hypothetical) looms was a poor substitute, and virtually a circular approach.

It was never remarked that the style of the three large-scale sets is unlikely to be typical of the work that kept the workshop, if such it was, in business because each

¹⁴⁷ http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/p7_tale_valance.htm

¹⁴⁸ *Catalogue of Loan Exhibition of English Decorative Art at Lansdowne House, London, 17-28 February 1929*, published in two editions, one without illustrations, another deluxe, with photographs and different catalogue numbering; *Loan Exhibition of English Decorative Art Depicting the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, Grosvenor Place, 26 Jan. - March 1933, also in two formats, one illustrated; Royal Academy of Arts, *Exhibition of British Art c.1000-1860*, 6 January-10 March 1934.

¹⁴⁹ E Sachs, *International Studio*, vol.94, December 1929, pp. 78-80; H. Goebel, *Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. 6, 1929, p.195.

of these sets, together with the hanging now at Sudeley Castle, still the only sizeable products credited to Barcheston, must have been a personal commission, and not ‘off the peg’ tapestries. Lack of resemblance between them is therefore not surprising. More important are the links between the attributions that followed of the smaller-scale, more easily marketable, items – the cushion covers and cupboard cloths in inventories of ‘the middling sort’.

Wace made efforts to find parallels for the smaller pieces,¹⁵⁰ yet he remained unaware how much was derivative. Not even the likeness shared by the cartouches in his exemplars was observed.¹⁵¹ Similarities to Brussels work in the large pieces from Chastleton passed unrecognized, as did the resemblance of the ribbon closing the ‘Sheldon’ arcade to the decoration of tapestries from the southern towns in the Low Countries.¹⁵² The contemporary written references, where no tapestry survives, shed little light. The arms woven for Sir John Talbot are but a tantalizing hint about a common possession.¹⁵³ The hangings of ‘fullage’ – possibly a corruption of *feuillage*, the cabbage-leaf tapestries - for which Barcheston’s parson had owed payment to Hyckes for ten years, has no parallel in surviving examples.¹⁵⁴ A later order for two complete suites and bed furnishings, demanded by a former friend as part of a debt repayment, provides no stylistic clues to what was wanted.¹⁵⁵ Two of these orders appear only in law suits where exaggeration or even untruth may be at play. At best, they suggest a contemporary belief in potential output from Barcheston which happens to conform to tapestry fashions.

It is regularly forgotten that Wace offered his conclusions as a tentative reconstruction; he stressed that ‘further discoveries both of documents and of tapestries will certainly throw much more light on the subject’. As he foresaw, the situation has altered. The total number of tapestries classified according to his criteria has increased from the 46 he knew to 116. The richly woven small tapestries now

¹⁵⁰ *Archaeologia* 78, p.304.

¹⁵¹ Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration*, p. 223.

¹⁵² Guy Delmarcel, ed., *Flemish Tapestry Weavers Abroad*, p. 185.

¹⁵³ *Archaeologia* 74, p. 186.

¹⁵⁴ TNA Req 2/121/32, sheet 2, Thomas Weelie’s deposition.

¹⁵⁵ Birmingham Archives Ms 3061/Acc1901-003/167897; see also nn.20, 22.

number sixteen, and are surrounded by a wider range of inscriptions in English. Some, ‘not the gift but the spirit of the donor’ for example, echo the deprecatory phrases of authors seeking favours.¹⁵⁶ Such tapestries can now clearly be seen as descendants of a long tradition of small pieces, both woven and embroidered, many inspired by prints.¹⁵⁷ Twenty-two floral ground pieces can be counted, the smallest increase; their affinities with Dutch work, noted by Wace, and with the long series of plant books issued by continental printers, indicate a continuing tradition, updated, but not necessarily in England alone.¹⁵⁸ The largest group (sixty-one) is of those where a single scene from a biblical narrative is shown enclosed by an arch. Several of these cycles, woven in sets of six, have been completed by pieces not previously known; the most popular themes were the Prodigal Son and Susanna and the Elders, followed by Abraham and Isaac.¹⁵⁹ Remarkable homogeneity in size (0.48m by 0.48m), presentation of details, quality and colour scheme might suggest ‘off the peg’ production, and slight differences in colour shades might suggest production by several workshops. Their predominance, not paralleled in continental ateliers, and their concentration in England, suggests they should perhaps be regarded as a style peculiar to England.¹⁶⁰ The balance in Wace’s sample, once evenly distributed

¹⁵⁶ Richard Barnfield, *Cynthia*, v; William Shakespeare, *Pericles*, act iii, scene iv.

¹⁵⁷ Judith and the Woman of Samaria have long antecedents, Goebel, *Wandeteppiche*, III, ii, plate 10; H.L.Turner, ‘Some small tapestries of Judith with the head of Holofernes: should they be called Sheldon?’, *Textile History*, 41(2), 2010, pp.161-81 and limited on-line access. For Isaac, see R.F.Burckhardt, *Gewirkte Bildteppiche des XV und XVI Jahrhunderts im Historischen Museum zu Basel*, Leipzig 1923, 49, illus and excellent contemporary documentation at note 202.

¹⁵⁸ F. De Nave, and D. Imhof, eds., *Botany in the Low Countries, end of the 15th century-ca.1650*, Antwerp: The Plantin-Moretus Museum and the Stedelijk Prentenkabinet, 1993.

¹⁵⁹ H. L Turner, ‘Tapestry strips depicting the parable of the Prodigal Son; how safe is an attribution to Mr Sheldon’s venture at Barcheston?’, *Archaeologia Aeliana*, fifth series, vol 37, 2008, pp.183-196, now on-line at <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/ProdigalSon.pdf>; ; E. A Standen, *European post-medieval tapestries*, 1985, ii, no 120; *Susanna* in *Archaeologia* 78, plates xlii (2), xliii, xliv-vi; *Isaac* in A.F.Kendrick, ‘An English tapestry panel: the Sacrifice of Isaac’, *Burlington Magazine*, vol 53, no. 309, pp. 287-8 and plate.

¹⁶⁰ Nine pieces were first found in Europe, usually in sales; for descriptions see <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/CompleteAnnotatedlist.pdf>; **Abraham**,

between the three groups, has very substantially altered. No larger-scale examples have been found, despite recent claims for the ‘Crocker’ tapestry.¹⁶¹

When the approaches used in analysing the tapestries once at Chastleton are applied to a wider selection of tapestries, a comparable wealth of results emerges. There is no space here to do more than summarize them briefly. The work of Anthony Wells-Cole has revealed how much in English decorative art in any medium was dependent on Flemish or German prints.¹⁶² Appraisal of sources challenges the supposition that Flemish weavers must have worked at Barcheston, though it does not exclude this possibility,¹⁶³ and renders redundant the older belief that Hyckes alone was the designer. Conservation work on the *Four Seasons* has revealed a Bruges mark; study of the emblems decorating their borders shows how extensively the emblem books were quarried and applied, reproducing a short-lived Brussels fashion.¹⁶⁴ The Warwickshire *Map*¹⁶⁵ and the *Arms of Sacheverell* have been related

7.1, 7.2.1; **Susanna**, 8.5.2, 8.7, 8.7, 8.7.1; **Joseph** embraces Benjamin, 10.3.1; **Nativity** 13.1.3; **Circumcision** 15. Others came to light in the USA; **Prodigal Son** 12.5.2, 12.6; **Charity** 18.1.4, **Prudence** 18.4.

¹⁶¹ Dominated by a moated lordly residence set in parkland across which chases a hunt, points of comparison, coincidence or correspondence of thematic material with ‘Sheldon’ tapestries are minimal, while colouring, scale and competence of execution are all superior. Unlike the others, it had no certain 16th-century English provenance and no personal identification. *Apollo*, June 2007, p.78-9. Academic publication http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/~media/Files/Collections/Recent%20Acquisitions/ra_2008_2010.ashx suggested only possible origin in England, *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Fall 2010, p. 26-27.

¹⁶² A. Wells-Cole, *Burlington Magazine*, 1990, p. 396; Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration*.

¹⁶³ E. M. Jourdain, ‘The tapestry manufacture at Barcheston’, in *Memorials of Old Warwickshire*, ed. A Dryden, pp. 30–8, London 1908; H. L. Turner, ‘“A wittie devise”: the Sheldon tapestry maps belonging to the Bodleian Library, Oxford’, *Bodleian Library Record*, 17, no.5, April 2002, pp. 293-313; ‘The Sheldon Tapestry Maps: their Content and Context’, *The Cartographic Journal*, 40 no1, June 2003, pp.39-49; *No Mean Prospect: Ralph Sheldon’s Tapestry Maps*, Plotwood Press, Oxford, 2010. For Judith, see n. 157.

¹⁶⁴ A similar mark appears in G. Delmarcel and E. Duverger. *Bruges et la Tapisseries*, Bruges, 1988, nos 17, 23, 26, 28, 29, 38, 53. Presence of the mark should not be understood to mean that these tapestries were woven in Bruges, which stylistically they in no way resemble; they might be products of one of the émigré weavers from the town then working in London, see H. L. Turner ‘A case of mistaken identity: the “Sheldon” *Four Seasons* tapestries at Hatfield House reconsidered’, *Emblematica*, 19,

through use of documentary material.¹⁶⁶ The latter, and three other tapestries not known to Wace, with readily identifiable sources but no apparent connection to Barcheston,¹⁶⁷ show how English taste reflected, however unskilfully, continental models, but also coincided with ‘Barcheston’ style. Without a definite and documented connection, however, the tapestries called ‘Sheldon’ could have been made by almost any weaver in England. In 1561 ‘six peces of arras made cushonlike with my Lord’s armes which were made at Barnard’s Castell’ were inventoried by Thomas the Frenchman in the household of the Earl of Pembroke.¹⁶⁸ The town clerk urged the stranger cloth weavers at Sandwich to produce six cushions of the value of 10s in the hope of influencing a favourable decision from William Cecil.¹⁶⁹

It thus becomes harder and harder to sustain the theory that all the tapestries called ‘Sheldon’ emanated from a single small workshop under one man’s direction. The brutal truth is that, had William Sheldon’s will not survived, no one in the 1920s would have dreamed of a tapestry workshop in a sparsely populated area of south Warwickshire. The pieces, engaging if not expert, might have remained in obscurity for many more years.

2012, pp. 1-25; Joan Kendall, 'The Four Seasons tapestries at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire', *Text*, Vol. 39, 2011-12; Michael Bath, *The Four Seasons Tapestries at Hatfield House*, Archetype, 2013, challenges the supposed date; G. de Tervarent, ‘Les animaux symboliques dans les bordures des tapisseries bruxelloises au XVIe siecle’, *Academie Royal de Belgique*, vol.13, fasc 5, 1968; M. Roethlisberger, ‘La Tenture de la Licorne dans la Collection Borromée’, in *Oud Holland*, lxxxii, 1967, no 3, 85-115.

¹⁶⁵ <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/WarwickshireTapestryMap.pdf> and <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/web/corporate/pages.nsf/Links/22B2A5FCFC87F49580257403003CFD9D>

¹⁶⁶ http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/p8_tale_sacheverell.htm and <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP38WhichSacheverell.pdf>

¹⁶⁷ <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/CompleteAnnotatedlist.pdf>
11.1.1 **Tobias and the Angel**, Parham House, Sussex and 19.2 **Huntsman**, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, T.645 - 1993 at http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/p24_views_huntsman.htm with two comparable pieces, one in a private collection and another 19.1 Lone Huntsman, Burrell Collection, Glasgow, accession 47.24.

¹⁶⁸ V&A, National Art Library Special Collections, KRP D 30, f. 98.

¹⁶⁹ Kent Archive Office, Maidstone, Sa/Ac 4, fo 193, Sa/Zb/5; H.T.Riley, ed., *Corporation of Sandwich*, Royal Commission on Hist Mss 5th Report, 1876, 569.

Conclusions

Sheldon's provisions, which can now be seen to be neither original nor unique, could have created a workshop, only if Hyckes were able to attract recruits and commissions. The evidence, however, does not immediately indicate a large establishment, and only imagination suggests the existence of 1500 looms throughout Warwickshire and Worcestershire, or of a cottage industry.¹⁷⁰ The carefully preserved records of Worcester diocese do not support such views. Only three wills written by local tapestry weavers survive – far outnumbered by those of cloth weavers, written for even a small inheritance.¹⁷¹ Extensive search of inventories fails to reveal purchase of even small items in any quantity. The capital for loans, available for only a limited period, cannot have been commensurate with runaway success, itself an idea not borne out by inventory evidence for a widespread local market. The steady stream of young men linked to Barcheston willing to take up the trade who then left to work in the Great Wardrobe in London might suggest a lack of local employment opportunities or, equally, execution of a deliberate policy. Certainly Hyckes' apprentices diluted an institution previously dominated by Flemings. But on no count does the evidence adduced in the 1920s support a major tapestry-weaving hub in the area where it was said to exist.

By contrast, in London, as in other continental urban centres where tapestry production sprang up as a result of economic migration, there does appear to have

¹⁷⁰ L. J. Hotson, *I, William Shakespeare*, London, 1937, p.22; *Cambridge History of Western Textiles*, ed. D. Jenkins, Cambridge University Press, 2003, vol i, p.603. There was never any evidence for the view first advanced on the intra website in the V&A (British Galleries Online/Places/UK/Central/Worcestershire), that Sheldon may have been attracted to Bordesley because there was a good supply of wool. Sixteenth century wool prices are unknown although the schedules of wool prices survive irregularly from the middle ages; they indicate that quality from Bordesley in 1294 ranked halfway between best and worst and sank further towards the end of the period, J.H.Munro, 'Wool-Price Schedules and the Qualities of English Wools in the Late Middle Ages c.1270-1499', *Textile History*, 9, 1978, pp.118-169, and T. H. Lloyd, *Movement of Wool Price in Medieval England*, *Economic History Review*, Supplement 6, 1973.

¹⁷¹ E.A.Fry, ed., *Worcester Wills*, British Record Society, xxxi, xxxix, London, 1904, 1910; Humfrey Hill 196; John Higgins 1603 and Richard Hyckes 1621.

been an embryonic industry.¹⁷² This should come as no surprise. It is paralleled by the long-accepted presence of cloth-weaving strangers, officially invited in the 1560s and 1570s to settle at Sandwich, Canterbury, Maidstone, Colchester and Norwich.¹⁷³ The documented presence of their compatriot tapestry weavers in London makes it impossible to regard Barcheston as the only production centre in Elizabethan England. That the industry was London-based and, like others, stranger-controlled, is the more probable hypothesis. Their craftsmanship, in many trades, was familiar to many Englishmen. It was often a source of grievances, sometimes riotously expressed;¹⁷⁴ it was sometimes wryly observed, as it was by Sir Thomas Elyot who wrote that Englishmen were compelled ‘if we wyll have anythinge well peynted, kerved or embrawdred to abandone our owne countraymen and resorte unto straungers.’¹⁷⁵

The fortunes of the ten or so identifiable London workshops must have fluctuated, and none was perhaps very stable. Yet some stayed in business for twenty years. Their products are not to be traced in documents, but neither is anything from Barcheston. As yet, it is impossible, by any forensic means, to differentiate the work that might have been executed on the continent from that executed in England, let alone to pinpoint an origin at Barcheston. All the products discussed were influenced by both the experience and training of the weavers and by the demands of contemporary taste, already dependent on continental, rather than native, sources. Barcheston work is not likely to have existed in isolation, yet the characteristics of its products were established on a basis that now seems less than convincing.

Wider knowledge of stylistic criteria, as of the Elizabethan background, indicates the need for a reassessment of all the tapestries called ‘Sheldon’ and for the application of controlled analysis. It may be that the term ‘Sheldon’ should be interpreted as shorthand for English sixteenth-century tapestry production rather than denoting tapestry from a particular workshop. It may also be that some, at least, of the tapestries that once went by that name, long since re-attributed to continental ateliers,

¹⁷² G. Delmarcel ed., *Flemish Tapestry Weavers Abroad*, Leuven, 2002.

¹⁷³ N. B. Harte ed., *The New Draperies*, Oxford, 1997.

¹⁷⁴ Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in London*, pp. 282, 292, 303.

¹⁷⁵ Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Book named the Governour*, ed. S Lehmborg, London 1962, Cap XIV, 52.

should now be regarded as products made in London for English families. Until specific evidence emerges to prove the point definitively, the possibility must be entertained that neither the tapestries found at Chastleton, nor any of the other tapestries called 'Sheldon', are products of Hyckes' team at Barcheston, but were woven by stranger weavers, working in traditions long familiar to them, as they were also to the purchasers.

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An associated web site <http://tapestriescalledsheldon.info> is now archived at

<http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20110425060029/http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/>

and work on the arras men employed in the Great Wardrobe London is at

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110622142122/http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php?title=Arras_Men_and_Tapestry_conservation_under_Elizabeth_I_1559-1603_-_Introduction