

Disentangling the threads - the Warwickshire Sheldon tapestry map

Hilary L. Turner ©

Hanging in the Warwickshire Museum is one of the most splendid products of Elizabethan England, the map of the county commissioned by Ralph Sheldon (1537-1613).¹ Traditionally, but far from certainly, it is thought to have been woven at Barcheston near Shipston on Stour, where his father had made plans to introduce tapestry-weaving.² Long considered to be a later copy of a sixteenth century original, closer examination reveals that the tapestry is in fact the original.

The tapestry which measures 390 x 510 cms (12 feet 9^{1/2} inches x 16 feet seven inches) presents a number of other puzzles. Within a narrow border resembling an ornate picture frame it depicts the red-bordered county so that north is on the lefthand side. Adjacent counties, each with a differently coloured background, complete the rectangle. The top lefthand corner is dominated by the royal arms, the lower by a scale, dividers and a woven date. In the righthand upper corner is a lengthy inscription below which are the arms of Edward Sheldon (1561-1643) and his wife Elizabeth Markham.

Six Sheldon map tapestries survive;³ dated by their borders to the sixteenth century are parts of Gloucestershire, and damaged, but substantial, sections of Worcestershire and

¹ This article was first published in *Warwickshire History*, 12, no.1 Summer 2002. Pictures are available at <http://heritage.warwickshire.gov.uk/museum-service/collections/the-sheldon-tapestry-maps/>
<http://www.windowsonwarwickshire.org.uk/> then search Sheldon tapestry map

² The earliest account of plans to introduce tapestry weaving at Barcheston was presented by John Humphreys, 'Elizabethan Sheldon Tapestries', *Archaeologia* 74, 1924 pp. 181-202, reprinted in 1929 without the post-lecture debate. Its twenty-four errors of fact were largely corrected in the only other research, E.A. Barnard and A.J.B. Wace, 'The Sheldon tapestry weavers and their work', *Archaeologia* 78, 1928, 255-314; criticism, pointing out its dependence on assumptions and associations, was voiced by E. Sachs in *International Studio*, vol. 94, December 1929, 78-80. Hilary L. Turner, 'Finding the Weavers; Richard Hyckes and the Sheldon Tapestry works', *Textile History*, 33, no. 2, November 2002, pp.137-161, and 'Tapestries once at Chastleton House and their influence on the image of the tapestries called Sheldon: a re-assessment' *Antiquaries Journal*, vol 88 2008, pp. 313-343 on-line at <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP41Chastletonrevision.pdf> suggest strongly that both earlier articles should be used with caution as should all descriptions derived from them. For this tapestry, P.D.A. Harvey & Harry Thorpe, *The Printed Maps of Warwickshire*, Warwick, 1979. Incorrect information about the tapestries is to be found in M. Jourdain, 'The Tapestry Manufacture at Barcheston', in *Memorials of Old Warwickshire*, A. Dryden, 1908, where Warwickshire and Worcestershire are used interchangeably and the illustration is of Worcestershire; VCH *Warwickshire*, vol. 2, is also incorrect; Leslie J. Hotson, I, *William Shakespeare*, London 1937, asserts (p. 22, without evidence) that Sheldon established 1500 looms.

³ Hilary L. Turner, *No Mean Prospect: Ralph Sheldon's Tapestry Maps*, Plotwood Press, Oxford, 2010. Only the Warwickshire tapestry is on display; a small piece from the Elizabethan Oxfordshire tapestry is on view in the British Galleries at the V&A, London. All were photographed for the exhibition catalogue of 1914, the only time all the examples have been seen together, *Victoria & Albert Museum Portfolios III, Tapestries*, 1915. Earlier photographs (1897), at half real size, of Warwickshire are in Birmingham City Library, Archives, IIRI, accession 139917; the Museum has a modern grid set. See also, borrowing heavily from Barnard and Wace and with additional mistakes, G. Wingfield-Digby, *The Victoria and Albert Museum, The Tapestry Collection, Medieval and Renaissance*, 1980, 71-78 & pl. 97.

Oxfordshire. The two latter were both woven a second time at some date in the later seventeenth century; still complete, they are versions on which some of the details have been altered rather than absolutely accurate copies of the earlier examples. The sixth is the hybrid Warwickshire tapestry. The tapestries have long been treated as two separate groups, partly because this was the way in which they seem to have been dispersed after the sale of family possessions from Weston House in 1781, partly because three have broad borders, three have narrower borders in a style produced by the Mortlake factory in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁴ To this latter group Warwickshire has always been assigned. What has not been noticed, however, is that the three earlier and broad bordered tapestries in fact share several common features; the royal arms in the top left-hand corner (Worcestershire), a scale and dividers in the lower left (Worcestershire, Oxfordshire), a paraphrase from Camden's *Britannia* within an elaborate strapwork cartouche in the upper right-hand corner (text surviving from Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, only part of the cartouche visible on Worcestershire) and the family arms over at least three generations in the lower right corner (Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire). All four of these design elements appear, in the same positions, on the complete Warwickshire tapestry.

Stylistically it is improbable that only one of the tapestries of which a later version was executed should have retained details found on the earlier examples while two were woven altering the position of, or even omitting, the earlier design elements. Closer examination showed that the Warwickshire border is not integral, in other words, it has been changed.⁵ It is very clearly stitched on with coarse thread, now dark brown. Moreover, the warp count of the map area and of the border are not identical which they would be if the tapestry were all of one piece. The warp count of the border corresponds to the count of the two seventeenth-century tapestries, that of the map area to those of the known earlier examples.⁶ The conclusion can only be that the Warwickshire tapestry belongs to the sixteenth and not the seventeenth century. It thus completes a set of four, whose measurements and orientations (two, Warwickshire and Gloucestershire, were woven with

⁴ The informative catalogue of the sale at Weston House, Christie and Ansell's 27 August - 11 September 1781 in the Archive of Christie's, London, lists the three tapestries bought by Walpole for 30 guineas as hanging in the Great Drawing Room; the measurements were given as 21 ft x 13, 13 ft x 17 and 13 ft x 15. 24 fragments of old tapestries hung in the maid's bedrooms, 2 pieces of 'historical' tapestry in the Green Worsted Damask Bedroom and 2 pieces in the second room on the right hand side from the top of the Back Stairs. None was acquired by Gough, whose notes, made for a projected revision of his *British Topography*, 1782, ii, 309-310, long formed the basis of comment; they are bound into the Bodleian Library's copy, Gough Gen Top 363-366. For eighteenth century records of the Weston tapestries, amplifying and revising earlier accounts, see Wendy Hefford, *From Mortlake to Soho: English tapestry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; a catalogue of tapestries in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, in preparation, which also studies similar borders. For a study of the Elizabethan borders, see A. Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England; the influence of continental prints, 1553-1625*, Yale 1997, 221-234.

⁵ My own deduction about the border was reached independently by studying photographs of all the maps. It turned out not to be novel; letters between A.F. Kendrick, Keeper of the Textile Department, Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Secretary of the York Philosophical Society, the then owners, indicate investigation of the idea in August 1914, V & A Archives and Registry, York Philosophical Society file MA/1/Y101, letters 28 August 1914 and 5 September 1914. Though it was agreed that it was a later alteration, no deductions followed.

⁶ Technical examination by the Hampton Court Textile Conservation Centre carried out for the Warwickshire Museum in 1980 also noticed the stitches and counted the warps; again, no deduction was made perhaps because the heraldry was wrongly described. Following a major mistake by Humphreys, (op cit., n.1) it was said to be Rocksavage, not Markham which had been identified, correctly, for the 1914 exhibition. The report, never published, was kindly made available to me by the Principal Museums Officer, Miss Helen Maclagan.

north to the left) suggest that they were designed to hang together in the same room.

The heraldry is not Savage (or Rocksavage) as is often said, but the arms of Sheldon quartered with Markham, the family into which Edward Sheldon married late in 1587. The occasion is one of the reasons why the tapestry might have been commissioned. The Sheldons were a family of both local and national importance. William (?1500-1570), who made plans to introduce tapestry weaving into the county, was related to Nicholas Heath, bishop of Rochester, Worcester and then Archbishop of York and lord chancellor under Queen Mary. Educated in the law, Sheldon acted as solicitor for Queen Katherine Parr in the 1540s, may have been briefly in the service of the Seymour family and held a post in the Court of Augmentations, the body which disposed of monastic lands. He made a substantial investment in ex-monastic lands and served four times as an MP and as sheriff of Worcestershire. He was quick to shift his loyalty on the accession of Queen Elizabeth - to Robin Dudley, the future earl of Leicester, already close to the new sovereign.⁷ William's will, written in 1570, outlined a scheme to introduce tapestry weaving at Barcheston under the direction of Richard Hyckes, appointed Queen's arrasmaker in 1569.⁸ The enterprise made use of Flemish, and trained English, workmen.⁹ The heir, Ralph, was charged continue those arrangements.

What the tapestry shows

The possession, and the idea, of a tapestry map were new in England and the set of four must have made the hall at Weston amongst the most richly decorated in the provinces. It is hard now from the much faded Warwickshire map to judge the impact of the original colour scheme, based on greens, yellows, blues and reds, better preserved in the Oxfordshire and Worcestershire examples, out of the light for at least two centuries, and probably longer. Certain features however, including the colour scheme and the materials of wool and silk, were common to all. The central county, whose background was always white, was named in large red letters and bordered by a broad band of red. Rivers were shown in blue; hump-back hills of varying height were always shadowed in darker green on their righthand side. Trees, depicted in several shades of green and with yellow highlights, are disproportionately obvious because they were the element most out of scale. The pictorial content is high; towns, large and small, are shown in some detail, their largest building prominent. Villages show less differentiation of detail, although a distinction is made, not always accurately, between churches with spires and those with towers. House roofs might be red or orange, while the walls were white. Castles, the houses and parks of the gentry enclosed by dark

⁷ E.A.Barnard, *The Sheldons*, Cambridge, 1936, woefully inadequate and lacking footnotes, is partly superseded by biographies in S.T.Bindoff, *The House of Commons, 1509-1558*, HMSO 1982 and S.L.Adams, 'Because I am of that Countrye and Mynde to Plante Myself There' *Midland History*, 20, 1995, 21-74. See <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP33BIOGWmS.pdf>

⁸ http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP35BIOGRichard_Hyckes.pdf
http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/p33_learn_ws_will.htm

⁹ The National Archives (TNA) PROB 11/53. Hyckes' pre-eminence is due largely to Anthony Wood, (1632-97) ed. Andrew Clarke, *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, antiquary of Oxford 1632-1695, described by himself*, *Oxford Historical Society*, 1891, I, 477n., while Treadway Nash's remark, *Collections for a History of Worcestershire*, London 1781, 2 vols, i, p.66, that Sheldon brought workmen over has been ignored. In an Elizabethan context, however, the latter is the more probable explanation for the establishment of the works. Anthony Wood would have been looking at the seventeenth century versions of Oxford- and Worcestershire, see <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O114027/tapestry/>

brown wooden palings are shown on a selective basis, as are bridges. Places were almost all named in large black capital letters, often clumsily executed, set on a rectangular label with a yellow ground.¹⁰ On Warwickshire, in contrast to the other tapestries where letters are frequently muddled, there is only one orthographic mistake (Fletcnamsted for Fletchamsted), though spellings were not always consistent with that of the same places on Worcestershire. The main county was named in red, the adjacent counties and any large areas, for example the Vale of Evesholme (Evesham), in a colour contrasting to the background; each county's background was different, varying from yellow through shades of green deepening the further the eye travelled from the light-coloured centre. The overall effect therefore is of light, with the eye drawn to the central county.

In all respects Warwickshire's pictorial content is similar to that of the other tapestries. The difference between the two areas of the county, the treeless Feldon to the east of the river Avon and the more thickly wooded Arden to the west, is clearly shown. As on Worcestershire, roads were drawn, though far from consistently, to be seen around Stratford on Avon, close to the area the Sheldons knew best, and over the Dassett hills. One, the Watling Street, was named in capital letters. Bridges, far fewer than those known to exist and not differentiated between those in stone and those of wood as had been done on the Worcestershire tapestry, were shown crossing the rivers, some of which are named in red capital letters. A beacon stands near Fenny Compton, and, outside the county, at Broadway. Palings delimited the parks of the gentry, not always enclosing a house, and showing a greater number than Saxton's map.¹¹ Even more interesting is the selection of fifteen residences which were depicted. Not all the county's great houses found a place; few Protestant and no Puritan establishments are represented. What then governed the choice? Eight houses had direct links to the Sheldon family; Weston, Skilts and Beoley (actually in Worcestershire) were Sheldon property; Coughton Court was the home of Anne Throckmorton, Ralph Sheldon's wife; the Grevilles, the Ardens and the Holtes, owners respectively of Beauchamp Court, Milcote and Goldicote, Park Hall and Dudson (modern Duddleston), were relatives by marriage or kinship with the daughters of William Willington, Ralph's grandfather. Of the other seven, the Berkeleys at Calendon and Harington first baron Harington at Combe were Sheldon cousins;¹² the Lords Windsor were his neighbours at Hewell Grange, at Maxstoke lived his friend and fellow catholic, Henry Lord Compton, while Compton Wynyates and Wormleighton belonged to men involved in local government who also came to be associated in official capacities with Sheldon family affairs.¹³ Only a

¹⁰ The town names are sometimes said to be embroidered. This is incorrect; the warp threads can be clearly seen running in a continuous horizontal line across the label. The stitches at top and bottom were intended to hold together areas of two contrasting weft colours. The occasionally reversed letter 'N' in the inscription is the result of later repairs.

¹¹ Saxton did not show Pooley, Great Packington, Lapworth, Baddesley Clinton or Clopton, all later marked by William Smith, Camden's 1607 *Britannia* and John Speed. However, within the county the tapestry included Holt (?Kingsbury) and Wasburton while also omitting Baddesley Clinton and Great Packington; it also shows Goldicote, as Saxton had, in the detached portion of Worcestershire.

¹² Identification of relationships derives from the Sheldons' genealogical tree, J.Humphreys, *op.cit.*, supplemented from the *Visitation Records*, Harleian Society, the *Victoria County History* or biographies.

¹³ Hewell, *VCH, Worcestershire*, ed. J.W.Willis Bund, 3, p.225-6, now on-line; Maxstoke, *Catholic Record Society, Miscellanea*, ii, 1906, p.27 and IV, 1907, p.5. The Memoirs of Father Persons, ed. Rev. J.H.Pollen; Sir William Compton acted in the Brailes dispute, TNA E 134/40 Eliz/Hilary 17 as did Sir William Spencer, E 134/39 Eliz/Easter 26 and E 134/39&40 Eliz/Mich 31, both 1596-97, see Hilary L. Turner 'An early map of Brailes', *Warwickshire History*, Summer 2001, vol.xi, no.5, 182-193, http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/An_early_map_of_Brailes.pdf.

Worcestershire example, resembles the multi-gabled frontage of Ward's much later drawing.¹⁵ Oddly, and in contrast to virtually every other house depicted, the park was shown by hedges, not ringed with a paling fence. Neither of the Sheldon houses at Beoley and Skilts was sketched before demolition but, completely different in appearance, there is little reason to doubt that there too the tapestry representation was intended to be accurate. None of the residences, however, was shown at any uniform size or scale. The largest is Kenelmworth (Kenilworth) castle, perhaps to hint at the relationship between the earl of Leicester and the Sheldons, massively out of scale even in relation to the towns of Coventry, Bromicham (Birmingham), Warwick, Stratford, Tamworth and, outside the county boundary, Lichfield. For each town an outstanding landmark confers individual characteristics and again suggests a drawing from observation and not imagination. The same thinking however was not consistently applied. Church spires and towers are distributed with little regard to reality, yet most of the windmills, for example outside Weston house and at Compton Scorfen, were Sheldon property; that at Weston is known to have stood until the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁶

Date and Deductions

In the upper left hand corner the royal arms in the style used from 1536 until 1603 are shown enclosed within an elaborate border of leaves and flowers. In the lower corner is a much smaller cartouche containing the woven date, 1588, the basis for the conventional view that the tapestries were made in that year, designed by Richard Hyckes whose name appears on the Worcestershire tapestry. It is further assumed from the date that they were intended to decorate the rebuilt house at Weston which Anthony Wood (1632-1695), Oxford gossip and antiquarian of the seventeenth century and friend of a later Ralph Sheldon (1624-84) 'the Great', states was completed in this year;¹⁷ the recently discovered account book suggests that it was not, though it was probably sufficiently advanced for room sizes to be known so that tapestries could have been ordered. The very fact that the house was accurately depicted also on Worcestershire, and very probably on Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire too, supports a later date for the weaving. The assumptions based on the date 1588 have given rise to another, namely that the cartographic source which inspired the design can only be the series of county maps published as an *Atlas* by Christopher Saxton surveyed between 1574 and 1579. The relationship between the tapestries and Saxton's work, traceable most clearly in the topographical relationships and in such obvious borrowings as the naming of the Watling Street along the county boundary with Leicestershire and the design of the dividers, goes beyond exact copying.¹⁸ Some names were corrected from their form on Saxton's map, for example Kuall appears as Knowle, Bearfoote as Barford, as they did on William Smith's map drawn around 1600. There were also numerous insertions; parks were included that were not shown by Saxton or by mapmakers working at the time of the tapestry's weaving, bridges

¹⁵ T. Ward, Collections for a History of Warwickshire, c.1810, British Library Add Ms 29265, fo.216; H Thorpe, 'The Lord and the Landscape', *Trans. Birmingham Archaeological Society*, 80 for 1962 (1965), 38-77.

¹⁶ R. Gough, *British Topography*, 3rd edition 1782, 310.

¹⁷ *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood*, I, 477n. Warwickshire County Record Office, CR 2632, in future Sheldon accounts.

¹⁸ The same dividers were shown on Saxton's Gloucestershire, Yorkshire and Westmorland, but not his Warwickshire map.

were indicated in far greater number and several places in the vicinity of Barcheston, in each of which the Sheldons had interests, had never been included by Saxton. These include Talton by Ettington, Longdon and Compton Scorfen and, most strikingly, the Rollright Stones just over the Oxfordshire border, not shown on any contemporary map.

All the older assumptions, however, are challenged by the evidence of the passages based on William Camden's *Britannia*, seen in the upper right hand corner; a few lines survive on the Gloucestershire map, rather more on the Oxfordshire tapestry. The longest passage is on the Warwickshire tapestry. Within an elaborate strapwork cartouche twenty-three lines executed in capital letters in white on a dark blue ground begin a description of the county and end with the exhortation to read 'Camden his Bri..' The reference is to William Camden's *Britannia*, a best seller, published in ever-expanding Latin editions six times between 1586 and 1607; in 1600 illustrations were included, in 1607, maps. What is significant for the dating of this tapestry is that the English paraphrase found here is closest to the text of the 1590 edition, mentioning places not found in the earlier versions and not subsequently found in the same order in later editions. The only tapestry to bear a date therefore contradicts its own evidence, and the assumptions stemming from that date. Does it indicate that the tapestry had not been begun before 1590 or was it not finished before then? Stylistically, much else points to a date later than 1588, and it is worth remembering that each tapestry would have taken time measurable in years to complete, though only a hypothetical calculation can be made; there is no evidence that they were woven at Barcheston and, given the very small number of men who can be identified as being there at any one time, it is at least as probable that these tapestries were woven in London. Much in the design suggests that the tapestries were executed sequentially rather than simultaneously, so that a rather later date, between 1590 and 1600, should probably be accepted for their weaving. This alters the context in which the tapestry content should be placed; after 1588 Saxton's were no longer the only maps in existence. John Norden worked in the Southeast, William Smith in the Midland, counties of England. There is, therefore, a wider selection of cartographic influences which need to be examined for any part they played.

Looking at Details

One of the most interesting features of all the tapestry maps is the depiction of the small towns pictorially, not by a symbol. Though a number of sixteenth century drawings of towns exist, both views and plans, some of them executed for the government in the interests of national defence, it is far from clear that the subject was of great interest to municipalities, other than the much drawn London, or even to individuals until the last years of the sixteenth century.¹⁹ On the tapestries, however, tiny sketches of the small market towns reveal a remarkable degree of accuracy, suggesting that they were made, as those of the houses may have been, from observation since there are no known models for places as small as Stratford, Tamworth, Birmingham or Southam. Lichfield and Coventry, much larger settlements, are shown at correspondingly greater size, also with considerable accuracy and for both there is one possible source of inspiration, William Smith's profile views which he included in his unfinished, and never published, *Particuler description of England and*

¹⁹ David Smith, 'The enduring image of early British townscapes', *Cartographic Journal*, 28, no.2, 1991, 163-175; for the general state of mapping Peter Barber, *England I*, 'Pageantry, Defense and Government', and *England II*, 'Monarchs, Ministers and Maps', in D. Buisseret, (ed.) *Monarchs, Ministers and Maps*, Chicago 1992, 26-98.

Wales.²⁰ The depiction of Warwick, for which Smith left space but never accomplished, is even more intriguing, because it has been shown as though seen from the south, the castle lying on the southeast side of the town; however, the orientation of the tapestry is with north to the left so that an accurate representation should have placed the castle on the upper side of the town. Stratford too, correctly shown with the church of the Holy Trinity on the southern fringe of the town and Clopton Bridge to the east, also contradicts the tapestry's orientation while conforming to conventional depiction. The discrepancy, as we would interpret it, may have come about because a drawing made, following the convention that was becoming increasingly accepted, of showing towns from the south, was used first on the Worcestershire tapestry, oriented with north to its top, and borrowed, without alteration, for later use here.



Stratford; by kind permission of Warwickshire Museum Service

Evidence of familiarity with current cartographic conventions is demonstrated again in the depiction of the smaller details, gates, park palings, bridges, windmills and beacons, for all of which parallels can be found amongst estate maps whose numbers rise steadily in the last years of the century. Some were drawn by the choice of the owner, others to make clear the boundaries of a recent land transfer but many more were called into being by the order of the royal courts to support a legal hearing heard far from the location of the disputed property.²¹ The example of Park Hall, Minworth has already been quoted. It was, apparently, a new medium where the ability of the artist made or marred the end product. Since neither the houses or the towns of the map tapestries are either formalised or imaginary like the buildings on other tapestries called Sheldon, it is tempting to think that someone with specific map-making knowledge was commissioned first to make the drawings then to transfer them onto the base map which was enlarged at a scale of three miles to the inch.

How was the tapestry produced ?

Very little in the content of the map area suggests that the design should be attributed to Richard Hyckes; the supposition rests on the inscription at the base of the Worcestershire tapestry. It reads *Wigorn' Comi' locupletata Ric' Hyckes* (the county of Worcester enriched Richard Hyckes). Lacking either a comma or a preposition, the wording does not reveal beyond doubt whether Hyckes 'enriched' the base map or merely put his name to it as its master weaver. He certainly knew the trade, for to this knowledge he must have owed his

²⁰ British Library Sloane Ms 2596, printed Henry Wheatley and W. Ashbee, London, 1879, pictured in Turner, *No Mean Prospect*, p.22.

²¹ P.D.A. Harvey, *Maps in Tudor England*, London, 1993; S. Bendall, *Dictionary of Land Surveyors and local Mapmakers*, two vols. London, 1997.

position as Queen's arrasmaker in the Great Wardrobe and at Barcheston.²² But apart from this, little is known about him, and there is nothing to substantiate the idea that he was capable of designing something as technically in tune with cartographic conventions as the tapestry maps certainly are. It has recently been pointed out that even the fact that Hyckes was sent abroad to train as a weaver, as Wood recorded a hundred years later, is inherently improbable. The sixteenth century tapestry trade was, Europe-wide, in the hands of the Flemings, and, given his appointment as head of the Fleming-dominated royal arras works fifteen years earlier than has hitherto been known, it is far more probable that Hyckes was not English but one of the many 'stranger' weavers who came to England to avoid religious persecution in his homeland. Certainly the only weaver about whom any personal details are known, Henrick Camerman, was born in Brussels and came to Barcheston aged 22 or so in 1564. He later left to make his living in London, the beneficiary perhaps of Sheldon's loan system detailed in Sheldon's will. The loans were available to English and stranger alike, though on different terms, and were probably intended to be the set-up capital necessary to start in business after completion of an apprenticeship. Other west Midlands men left money for this purpose; two merchants left bequests to Warwick corporation, as had Sheldon's father in law, William Willington; Sir John Huband asked that his debts collected after his death should be distributed to young men in local towns.²³

How far the enterprise was successful is unknown. The marked absence of evidence either for weavers living in or near Barcheston, or for the existence of any of the subsidiary industries such as dyeing, makes it plausible to suggest that some at least of the tapestries classed as Sheldon were woven by the Flemish arras workers recorded in the tax lists for London. It may be that the map tapestries were amongst them, for the complexity of the design of their original wide borders filled with allegorical and mythological figures, based, as was contemporary practice, on print sources, demanded experienced craftsmen. This in turn might suggest links to Flemish engravers or designers which might help explain the observance of cartographic conventions. Rather than themselves being talented designers and gifted weavers, the Hyckes may have been versed only in the management of a workshop. Ralph Sheldon's account book reveals that both Hyckes were made use of in various capacities on the family estates, suggesting that their position was similar to that of Robert Smythson in the Willoughby household at Wollaton.²⁴ Whether, like Smythson, they were capable of original work is a question yet to be answered.

The personal note

Nevertheless the enhancement of Saxton's tiny symbols, the addition of images such as the Rollright Stones and the stress on family links make these tapestries entirely personal; they

²² http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP35BIOGRichard_Hyckes.pdf
http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP36BIOGF_Hyckes.pdf

²³ Wendy Hefford, 'Flemish Tapestry Weavers in England: 1550-1775', in *Flemish Tapestry Weavers Abroad*, ed. Guy Delmarcel, Leuven University Press, 2002, pp. 43-61, now on-line. For the loans, T. Kemp, ed., *The Black Book of Warwick*, Warwick 1899, 314-318. The bequest does not appear in Willington's will, http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php?title=William_willington Huband's will is TNA PROB 11/66/331 (1584); the towns he hoped might benefit were Coventry, Hereford, Leominster, Stratford on Avon, Henley in Arden, Warwick and Kenilworth; his executor was the earl of Leicester.

²⁴ Sheldon Accounts, *passim*; M Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House*, London, 1972.

are almost unique survivals, for there are no known parallels and only one imitation.²⁵ That Sheldon himself may have been involved in working out the design should also be considered. It is perhaps not entirely surprising that it should be a Warwickshire gentleman who had the idea of portraying his homeland in such an original medium. Sheldon himself was well known in, and in touch with, the world of learning and ideas, and his county was not then known as the birthplace of Shakespeare, but as the home of a number of men interested in historical knowledge. Amongst them were Raphael Holinshed, editor of a two volume illustrated *Chronicle* whose first edition was published in 1577, only just failing to include maps; Sir Fulke Greville, whose help Camden and Speed acknowledged; Michael Drayton, the author of *Poly-Olbion*, a work published in 1612 which described England in verse (of sorts);²⁶ Philemon Holland, the first official translator of Camden's *Britannia*, a schoolmaster in Coventry whose sons were involved with the print trade in London.²⁷ Sir Henry Ferrers of Baddesley Clinton assisted Camden with information for the very substantial revision of the latter's account of the county in the 1607 edition of the *Britannia*, the beginning of a tradition of local historical investigation, carried on by Sir Symon Archer, and culminating in the work of Sir William Dugdale.²⁸ Nearby, in Worcestershire lived Thomas Habington who, confined to his own county as punishment for his share in the Gunpowder Plot, used his time to compile a history of the area.²⁹

Given that the tapestries demonstrate strong similarities with cartographic conventions, contain internal evidence for their dating and clearly celebrate the catholic families to whom Sheldon was related, facts which have not hitherto been observed, should 1588 still be regarded as the date of production or does it bear other interpretations? One clue lies in the arms depicted on the Warwickshire tapestry, which commemorate the marriage in 1588 of Edward, son of Ralph and grandson of William, whose plan it was to introduce tapestry weaving, to Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Markham of Ollerton, sometime Captain of the Queen's Band of Gentlemen Pensioners. The Gloucestershire tapestry showed the arms of Ralph Sheldon quartered with those of Anne Throckmorton.³⁰ The date 1588 might

²⁵ The inclusion of the Rollright Stones probably relates to local antiquarian interest. It was not the purpose of these tapestries to map every detail; thus Jonathan Bate and Dora Thornton, *Shakespeare Staging the World*, London 2012, p.62 have mistaken the hump of Brailes hill (232m/760feet) for the pimple of a barrow within the parish. Greater local detail is apparent on the only later example, Muriel Clayton, 'A Tapestry Map of Nottinghamshire', *Trans. Thoroton Society*, xxxviii 1934, 65-80, Castle Museum of Costume and Textiles, Nottingham.

²⁶ Holinshed was steward to the Burdett family at Packington, a property purchased from William Sheldon who was later appointed as Overseer of its new owner's will, Bindoff, *op.cit.*; Sheldon Accounts f.69 & British Library Add Ms 36583 f.1; *Calendar of State Papers Domestic 1598-1601*, 62.

²⁷ W.B.Stephens (ed.), *Victoria County History, Warwickshire*, viii, 1969, 143,220, now on-line.

²⁸ Jan Broadway, 'William Dugdale and the Significance of County History in Early Stuart England', *Dugdale Society Occasional Papers*, no.39, 1999.

²⁹ Thomas Habington, *A Survey of Worcestershire*, ed. John Amphlett, *Worcester Historical Society*, 2 vols., 1895 & 1899, ii,68.

³⁰ The arms of his grandson, William, born in 1589, were shown on the sixteenth-century Oxfordshire tapestry <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O78898/tapestry-fragment/> while those of his father were almost certainly on the Worcestershire tapestry, now damaged.

also commemorate the birth of the heir William II late in the year, the construction if not the completion of the new house at Weston where the tapestries are said to have hung and last, but not least, the defeat of the Spanish Armada - a date which, though celebrated in numerous forms of 'souvenir', could only acquire lasting significance long after the event.³¹ None of these possibilities requires the tapestry to be woven in 1588, in itself an impossible achievement, or proves that it was.

The spread of interest in maps is one factor in favour of a later date, although their use as decoration was nothing novel. Though rarely mentioned in inventories, recent research shows that printed maps did form part of decorative schemes at least in the upper echelons of society, a taste for which Saxton produced his wall map of England.³² On a grand scale the earl of Leicester had not only a painted cloth showing the counties of Oxford and Berkshire, but also a sizeable collection of smaller maps, some part of which might well have been known to Ralph Sheldon; Cecil and Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth's chief ministers, both possessed galleries specifically devoted to map displays, though neither is known to have contained a tapestry example.³³ On the continent large scale tapestries, a map of Paris, the story of the siege of Tunis specially sketched at the time, a map of Leiden and a reconstruction of the battle of Pavia were woven in the Flemish ateliers and might have been known by repute at least to the Sheldons or to the émigré weavers living in London.³⁴ These tapestries were matched in England only by the Armada tapestries ordered by Howard Lord Effingham, admiral of the English fleet, around 1596 from a Delft workshop.³⁵

What then led Ralph Sheldon, a known catholic, a man debarred from office because of his religion but wealthy, able and by no means afraid of fighting his corner, as his correspondence shows, to commission these tapestries?³⁶ One answer may lie in the choice of

³¹ *Armada Exhibition Catalogue, 1588-1988*, ed. M.J.Rodrigues-Salgado, Penguin Books, 1988.

³² Susan Foister, 'Paintings and other works of art in sixteenth century inventories', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. cxxii, no. 938, May 1981, 273-282. R.A.Skelton, *Saxton's Survey of England and Wales: with a facsimile of Saxton's wall-map of 1583*, Amsterdam 1974.

³³ The earl's 'mappe of the counties of Oxon, Bucks and Berkes in clothe', *HMC Papers of the Marquess of Bath V*, HMC vol 58, ed G. Dynfalt Owen, London 1980, 203, inventory of Leicester House, July 1580. Jane Clark, 'The Buildings and Collections of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester', MA thesis, Courtauld Institute, University of London, 1981; W.B.Rye, *England as seen by Foreigners*, London 1865, 198; C. Delano-Smith, 'Map ownership in seventeenth century Cambridge', *Imago Mundi*, 47, 1995, notes 1 and 38. It is worth speculating whether Perne's original inspired the Coughton cloth.

³⁴ W.G.Thomson, *A History of Tapestry Weaving*, 1973 ed., p. 204. For émigré weavers in London, see Hilary L. Turner, 'Tapestries once at Chastleton House and their influence on the image of the tapestries called Sheldon: a re-assessment' *Antiquaries Journal*, 88 2008, pp. 313-343 now on-line <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP41Chastletonrevision.pdf>

³⁵ John Pine, *The Tapestry Hangings of the House of Lords, representing the several engagements between the English and the Spanish Fleets, in the ever memorable year 1588*, London 1739; some have now been recreated in paint and hang in the House of Lords; G.T. Van Ysselsteyn, *Geschiednis der Tapijtweverijen in de Noordejike Nederlanden*, 1936, xxxvi; Peter Barber, *op.cit.* note 17, p.75, and fn.149.

³⁶ Despite repeated suspicion of involvement in plots and questioning by the Privy Council Sheldon was not under frequent house arrest but allowed to go free. Jonathan Bate and Dora Thornton, *Shakespeare Staging the World*, London 2012, p.61, misquote Brendan Minney's now dated 'The Sheldons of Beoley', *Worcestershire Recusant*, vol. 5 May 1965, pp.1-17; nor was Sheldon under surveillance in the months before the Armada as

the houses selected for special treatment. Most of them belonged to law-abiding catholics; was this a covert declaration of Sheldon's own loyalty to the throne whose officers had watched him since the 1580s?³⁷ It is perhaps not surprising that Sheldon should have used a means with which he was familiar to commemorate his family. His action was not without parallels. Around 1596 the Throckmortons of Coughton Court ordered the painting of the cloth known as the *Tabula Eliensis* which depicted the arms of all the catholic gentlemen imprisoned for their faith at Ely, whose cathedral is shown at the top; a little earlier his relative, Sir Thomas Tresham built the Triangular Lodge covered in the symbols of the Trinity.³⁸ Ralph chose to have woven a set of tapestries fit for the great new house on the hill which commanded views of countryside much of it owned by the family. The re-dating of this tapestry to the years of the earliest occupation of that house adds to the picture of Ralph Sheldon and his interests; for us, as for Sheldon and his guests, the fun lies in unlocking the allusions.

The text was first published in Warwickshire History, 12, no.1 Summer 2002 pp 32-34 under the title 'This work thus wrought with curious hand and rare invented arte: the Warwickshire Sheldon Tapestry Map', with an illustration not of my choice. It is presented here with the kind permission of the Journal, first published on <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info> in 2011, 2012, revised 2018, 2020. © Hilary L Turner is hereby identified as author of this work in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright Designs and Patents Act of 1988

Since the article was written the tapestry has undergone conservation treatment.

were many others, Conyers Read, *Lord Burghley and Queen Elizabeth*, London 1960, p.421.
http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP34BIOGRalph_Sheldon.pdf

³⁷ For Sheldon's connections see Hilary L. Turner "A wittie devise", The Sheldon tapestry maps belonging to the Bodleian Library', *Bodleian Library Record*, vol. 17, no.5, April 2002, pp. 293-313 and *No Mean Prospect: Ralph Sheldon's Tapestry Maps*, Plotwood Press, Oxford, 2010, p.27-29.

³⁸ W.H.StJohn Hope, 'A Painted Cloth found at Coughton Court Warwickshire', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries London*, June 1910; Malcolm Airs, *The Buildings of Britain, Tudor and Jacobean*, London 1982,177.