

## Chapter Thirteen : Conformity Again 1589-94

### The Armada's aftermath

As the Armada fleet disappeared round the Scottish coasts, blown by the wind the English later attributed to Providence and the justice of their cause, the privy council vented a collective sigh of relief. Technically at least the defeat of Spain was an English victory, even if it did nothing to remove, let alone prevent, the threat of further attacks by Spain and her allies. The longer term repercussions would divide the Catholic community still more sharply into those prepared to work with the status quo in England and the extremists, mostly those living abroad, who became still more aggressive. Amongst the Protestant ruling class there was a hardening of the view that Catholics were to be regarded as dangerous, automatically suspect and potential traitors.

Ralph, still with an unfinished house, deprived of his office as JP because his wife was a recusant – as if her disobedience were of more account than his! – and now paying fines might well have experienced the harsher side of life. But the Queen's immediate need of money gave him an opportunity. His status as a fine-paying recusant was of no account when it was remembered he could once again be useful to the privy council. In November 1588, four months after the Armada's defeat, the need to summon a new parliament to grant taxation was matched by the council's attempt to ensure its members would be amenable to government aims. One such man was William Combe, elected in Droitwich. Later gossip said that he 'was liked by some in authority', naming in particular Archbishop Whitgift and Cecil/Lord Burghley.<sup>1</sup> It seems possible they turned to Ralph Sheldon for help. Combe was Sheldon's cousin, son of his aunt by her second marriage; he was related also to the old-established Brace family long prominent in borough affairs with several of whom Ralph and his father had had dealings. It is tempting to think that Ralph, as owner of a substantial number of bullaries in the town each carrying the right to cast a vote, might have been a moving force in his return. Willingness to assist would have done him no harm as a way to reinstate himself in official favour. Equally, however, acknowledgement that his assistance might be useful also acknowledged that the state could not afford to brush aside local help, whatever its quality.

In addition to paying the taxation granted, Ralph contributed a further £50 to a 'loan' requested by the queen to defray the enormous expenses of the previous year; a total of £1500 was asked of Warwickshire inhabitants again amongst the highest contributors in the county to this 'most needful service to Her Majesty'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hasler, *House of Commons*.

<sup>2</sup> Noble, *The Names of those Persons...*, p. 66; *CSPD 1581-90*, p. 585 no. 37, 31 March 1589; SP 12/223/ ff.56-57.

For a time domestic matters came to the fore. The birth at Weston of Ralph's grandson, christened William, in March 1589,<sup>3</sup> was balanced a year later by the death of Ralph's step-mother Margaret. Aged eighty, she was the last member of the older generation. Although absent from her inner counsels, he had paid her allowance regularly, played cards with her, at least once sent her a hogshead of wine and allowed her sheep to graze on his lands at Ditchford.<sup>4</sup> She bequeathed him no more than a gilt cup, acknowledgement of a relationship that was little more than dutiful.<sup>5</sup> Margaret relied heavily on her son in law, Thomas Throckmorton of Coughton, and on her first husband's officials, in particular on William Walter, involved in negotiation of and trustee for the marriage settlement agreed with her second husband, Ralph's father.<sup>6</sup> On her death, however, the plaque above her tomb described her as 'Mistress Sheldon of Belee daughter to the Lord Brooke';<sup>7</sup> she was buried on March 16 1590 in the now destroyed church of St Thomas the Apostle, east of St Paul's within the city of London, suggesting she had occupied her own lodgings and did not share the family apartments in the Whitefriars.<sup>8</sup> For Ralph the funeral would have been an opportunity to renew old acquaintance, particularly with Robert Walter, her steward's eldest son.

As relief over the failure of the Armada receded into the past, replaced by the sobering realization that little had changed, the privy council turned again to the problem of discontent with the religious settlement, expressed now not only by Catholics but increasingly vociferously also by those who sought a more Puritan church.

### **A second conformity**

The moves were a harbinger of things to come. They may also be the spur which caused Ralph to decide, once again, that attendance at a parish church, conformity, was the sensible option. Quite how his second conformity was achieved is unknown. No records show that he followed the statutorily defined path and undertook a public profession of his change of heart as both he and his sister Philippa had been forced to do in 1581. However, he ceased to pay fines after only three years which could happen only if the recusant conformed.<sup>9</sup> His name was not transferred to the newly instituted recording system, the Recusant Rolls, introduced at Michaelmas 1592. In 1594 a boastful servant said that Sheldon had appealed to Lord Chancellor Hatton whose Catholic sympathies had been public knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Hatton was said

<sup>3</sup> Barnard, *The Sheldons*, 9 March, p. 48; Burke, *Three Roman Catholic families*, p.51.

<sup>4</sup> WaCRO CR 2632, ff. 34, 60, 121, 127, 174, 177, 188.

<sup>5</sup> TNA PROB 11/75/190; codicil written 2 March, proved 12 March.

<sup>6</sup> One of Whorwood's stewards, *L&P Henry VIII*, 1545, vol. 20,( II), p. 514, no.1033, SP 1/212 f.113; William Sheldon's inquisition post mortem, TNA C 142/159/87, WARD 7/13/135.

<sup>7</sup> Once Chief Baron of the Exchequer, he died in 1529.

<sup>8</sup> Chester, *Parish Registers of St Thomas the Apostle, London*. Cathryn Enis, *Two Warwickshire Women*, is mistaken in thinking her burial took place in Warwickshire.

<sup>9</sup> Entered on the pell rolls, TNA E 401/1842-48 and on the Pipe Rolls. The fines were levied retrospectively for the year September 1586-October 1587, in full for 1587-88 and 1588-89 but recorded as a debt in 1589-90. TNA E 372/ 432-35; printed Bowler and McCann, *Recusants in the Exchequer Pipe Rolls 1581-1592*, p.152.

<sup>10</sup> *CSPD 1591-1594*, p. 545, no. 92; TNA SP 12/249 f.152-154v, esp. f. 152v.

to have instructed the man who forced the conviction, the Lord Chief Baron, the Assize judge Sir Roger Manwood, to reverse his decision, informing him that Sheldon had been seen attending service with him in his own private chapel in London. That detail cannot be quite true since Sheldon's presence then in Worcester is independently attested in the account book, but the implication that Hatton's help had been invoked probably contains some truth. It is the only clue to the means whereby Ralph escaped payments after only three years.

It is possible, but uncertain, that Hatton's assistance is reflected in the couplet which mocked Ralph's compliance; the words *pecora campi*, part of a phrase in Psalm 8, had also been Hatton's nick-name amongst Queen and courtiers around 1582.<sup>11</sup>

Sheldon is fallen and do you know why?  
Oves et boves et pecora campi  
(sheep, oxen and flocks of the field)

Usually interpreted as referring to the situation in 1580-1, the words were first recorded only around 1596, appearing again in a version dated to 1608 of Father Persons' account of his time in England begun after 1594.<sup>12</sup> If *pecora campi* really is an allusion to Hatton the couplet is equally relevant to Ralph's little known second conformity. The insinuation is clear; Sheldon was thought to prefer his wealth to political and possibly even physical struggle, its jeering tone hard to bear, whether composed by hard-line Catholics or jubilant Protestants.

As the account book shows, Sir Christopher Hatton (d. November 1591) had been one of Sheldon's most powerful contacts in government.<sup>13</sup> But Ralph's second change of heart would also have been eased because death removed those who might have opposed it; the earl of Leicester died early in September 1588, his support long since lost to Ralph. Leicester's brother, the earl of Warwick, died in February 1590 and Sir Francis Walsingham in April. Despite subsequent shifts in loyalties after their influence was removed, Ralph already had friends sufficiently influential to have been able to help him. Assistance might also have come from Thomas Markham, Ralph's brother in law who was certainly able to exert influence on the authorities on behalf of his own family.<sup>14</sup> Ralph's rehabilitation was reinforced by his inclusion alongside Markham in a commission which began in January 1591 concerning the complex family affairs of William Stokes, cousin and next heir to Adrian Stokes of Beaumanoir, Leicestershire, and his Throckmorton connections.<sup>15</sup> Nine

<sup>11</sup> Younger follows traditional opinion in attributing the jingle's origin to events in 1580-81, *Sir Christopher Hatton*, pp. 74-5, speculating on but not substantiating Hatton's influence then. He ignores the clear reference made in 1594, *CSPD 1591-1594*, p. 545, no. 92; TNA SP 12/249 f.152-154v, to the Lord Chief Baron, the basis for my later dating. His note 129, p. 110, entirely discounts Sheldon's conviction in 1587 by the Lord Chief Baron, Sir Roger Manwood, *CSPD 1581-90*, p.449, no. 83; TNA SP 12/206/, f.175. He is completely incorrect to say that Sheldon was arrested in October 1580 specifically for recusancy, p. 75. Further details appear in Turner, 'Cloaked in Conformity', pp. 571-2 and Chapter Nine above.

<sup>12</sup> Donno, *Harington's Metamorphosis of Ajax*, 239; *Notes on the English Mission*, CRS, vol. 4, 1907, pp. 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> TNA C 2/Eliz/R11/60, 1588/89; WaCRO CR 2632, ff. 28, 31, 79, 81, 127, 172.

<sup>14</sup> In 1592 Markham succeeded in stopping commissioners from proceeding against his wife's suspected 'popery' and, later, on the same charge, against a more distant relative. *CSPD 1591-94*, p. 174, no. 25, January 1592; *APC 22 1591-92*, p. 205-06, 25 January 1591/92; *ibid.*, p. 257, 19 Feb 1591/92.

<sup>15</sup> *APC 20 1590-91*, pp. 242-3, January 30; pp. 266-67, 5 February, 15 *APC 21 1591*, 1591, p. 187, 13 June; *APC 22 1591-92*, pp. 56, 63; p.263, 1591.

months later Ralph was appointed to a second commission, in Warwickshire, with Fulke Greville senior (d.1606), as an arbitrator between the bailiff and burgesses of Stratford upon Avon over disputed rights in lands within the borough.<sup>16</sup> In both cases, and as there had been in the troubles over coneyes in Brailes and the difficulties in Aston-sub-Edge in the 1570s, there were personal links; to the Throckmorton family in the Stokes investigation, to his own family in matters at Stratford.<sup>17</sup>

Withdrawal from public life might be considered prudent. By and large public appearances were few as Ralph retreated into a world of his own, preoccupied with his building plans, a commission for his own portrait, for a frieze of portrait heads to decorate the house and another for the map tapestries as well as with land purchases. Briefly, he even gave up the pursuit of law cases in the central courts.

### **The political background**

The 1590s was a decade uncomfortable for both rulers and ruled. The privy council was split and divided by attitudes to religion, tormented by the succession question in the absence of an heir of Elizabeth's body, faced with the task of governing a country plagued by famine and factions and with a steadily more clamorous House of Commons. The country was at war on two fronts, in the Low Countries and in Ireland. Both countries could be, and were, a base for malcontents, Catholic in particular. Exile friendships and contacts stretched from Rouen to Rome via Antwerp and Madrid. It was largely because of the fractious exile community abroad that their co-religionists in England came under very considerable strain, the reason why, in October 1591 Burghley issued a proclamation strengthening existing measures.

Powers similar to today's stop and search were expanded. The head of every household was required to question any one asking for accommodation. Suspicions or knowledge of any one recently abroad were to be reported.<sup>18</sup> Every town or large parish had to appoint 'some persons of honest behaviour and loyal in religion' to 'observe all such as refuse obstinately to resort to the church' and, of course, to report them. Further restrictions on Catholics were enacted in the Parliament of 1593.<sup>19</sup>

It is for the composition of this parliament, summoned to meet in mid-February 1593, that Ralph's help was perhaps again sought to exert influence to help the election of a government candidate. Robert Walter, well known and clearly well liked, round the court had been long acquainted with Sheldon; his father had served Sheldon's step-mother.<sup>20</sup> Without

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<sup>16</sup> SCLA ER 2/22, 5 October 1591.

<sup>17</sup> Adrian Stokes, entangled in a complex inheritance story, had married the widow of Sir Nicholas Throckmorton in 1571, becoming stepfather to Mary Grey sister of Lady Jane, Baldwin, *Henry 8's last love*, p. 190; Lisle, *The Sisters who would be queen*. Part of the story is told in Bodl MS.Eng.hist.c.482/fols.26-34. Sheldon's niece Anne Daston married Ralph Huband, brother of Sir John Huband whose will bequeathed his brother the Stratford tithes, TNA PROB 11/66/331.

<sup>18</sup> Hughes and Larkin, *Tudor Proclamations*, vol iii, pp. 86-93.

<sup>19</sup> *Statutes of the Realm*, IV (ii), pp. 843-6, 35 Eliz. c.1, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Hasler, *House of Commons*, Robert Walter.

obvious local connections, Walter's election for the borough of Droitwich, like that of Combe in 1588, upset the voters' usual practice of choosing borough officials. His election seems unlikely to have come about without help, perhaps through Ralph's use of his own voting rights attached to the ownership of salt bullaries. Robert's candidature was more probably William Cecil's decision than a gesture, or debt, Ralph owed to the Walter family and his willingness to assist a desire to please Cecil.

One, at least, of the sterner measures enacted in this parliament should have touched Sheldon – the monthly fine of £10 for harbouring any recusant guest or servant - for during these years he was sheltering his Catholic creditor, Thomas Horde, recently convicted as a recusant. Despite his presence at Weston being known to the clerks of the Exchequer, and probably also to the neighbourhood, no action was taken.<sup>21</sup> Ralph's conformity, and more than possibly his contacts, offered protection from the harsher conditions.

### Family duties

Despite the background Ralph could not ignore the need to arrange marriages for his four remaining unmarried daughters.

His choice for his sixth daughter, Anne, baptized in December 1571,<sup>22</sup> lighted on John Peshall, eldest son of Thomas of Horsley in Eccleshall, Staffordshire.<sup>23</sup> Possibly some ten years older than his bride, John was admitted to the Inner Temple in November 1588, aged 28.<sup>24</sup> Like Sheldon himself, he married while still a student, possibly around 1589-90.

Anne enjoyed a comfortable life style in a family of some prestige. Her father in law, a known, if perhaps lukewarm, Catholic, had been amongst those rounded up for questioning after the Staffordshire Progress of 1575. One valuation credited him with lands worth close to £300.<sup>25</sup> In 1585 he had been asked to supply a lance.<sup>26</sup> Taint of Catholicism followed him through the 1590s, avoiding the accusation of being an 'obstinate recusant' in 1591 and side-stepping appearance at the Assizes in 1597.<sup>27</sup> He died seventeen years later, mid-way through his term as sheriff in 1608, leaving a sizeable estate, stretching across Staffordshire and into Shropshire.<sup>28</sup> John served as sheriff in 1615-16 and as feodary of the shire, presiding at the inquisition post mortem of his brother-in-law Fowler in 1621.<sup>29</sup> When he died, in 1644, Anne, mentioned only as 'my dearlie beloved wife', was given a copyhold estate for life to

<sup>21</sup> Calthorp, ed. *Recusant Roll no. 1 Mich 1592-1593*, p. 254.

<sup>22</sup> WAAS, Beoley Parish Registers.

<sup>23</sup> The conflicting genealogies of the Peshall family (Burke and Burke, *Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies* and Cokayne, *Baronetage*) and assorted visitations agree only on John's parentage.

<sup>24</sup> Cooke, *Members ...the Inner Temple*, p. 120; shorter version, nd, p. 57. Both describe him as 'of Bordesley, perhaps a misreading for Horsley, his parental home.

<sup>25</sup> Ryan, 'Diocesan Returns of Recusants for England and Wales 1577', p.92; Landor, *Staffordshire Incumbents*, SHC 1915, p.374.

<sup>26</sup> *Staffordshire Incumbents*, SHC 1915, 367-388 at p.377.

<sup>27</sup> Petti, 'Roman Catholicism' SHC 4<sup>th</sup> s ix, 1979, pp. 70-71.

<sup>28</sup> Wedgwood, 'Staffordshire Sheriffs', in SHC 1912, p.286. *Burke and Burke*, 1844, p. 406.

<sup>29</sup> TNA C142/216/21.

supplement her jointure.<sup>30</sup> Lands at Great & Little Sugnall and Dorslow were specifically assigned for her maintenance, later confirmed to her by the Parliamentary Commissioners.<sup>31</sup> She was dead by June 1653.<sup>32</sup>

Her sister Katherine, traditionally but perhaps not correctly regarded as being Sheldon's seventh daughter, married Francis Trentham of Rocester, Staffordshire, on 25 June 1592 at Long Compton.<sup>33</sup> Several years her senior, the bridegroom had been known to Sheldon for twelve years or more through their mutual acquaintance with Thomas, Lord Paget and evenings spent singing the music of William Byrd.<sup>34</sup> Admitted to Grays Inn in February 1584, his parents had both, briefly, been members of the earl of Leicester's household.<sup>35</sup> Francis himself served amongst the earl's attendants in 1586, one of the three of Ralph's sons in law to do so.<sup>36</sup> His father, Thomas, had been prominent in county affairs as JP, MP and *Custos Rotulorum* (keeper of the rolls), ordered, as deputy lieutenant, to attend Mary Queen of Scots on her removal from Tutbury in September 1586 to Fotheringay.<sup>37</sup> After his father's death in 1588 Francis took his place in county administration. In 1606, in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot, he was obliged to pass over a letter in which one of the arrested plotters attempting to save himself, claimed that the Jesuit Thomas Lister was 'priest unto Mr Ralph Sheldon at Beoley'.<sup>38</sup>

In December 1591, only a few months before her brother's wedding Francis' sister, Maid of Honour to the Queen and a renowned beauty, contracted a marriage with the unstable, unreliable and heavily indebted Edward de Vere, 17th earl of Oxford.<sup>39</sup> His first wife had been William Cecil/Lord Burghley's eldest daughter. Even if, in theory, the alliance opened up a wide circle of contacts together with a closer link to Cecil, Ralph might well have experienced mixed feelings. De Vere's previous behaviour had scarcely been exemplary while the Trentham's efforts to enlarge their estates in the guise of paying his debts drained the family finances. Despite extensive estates and a generous jointure, Katherine's will of 1633 reveals her impoverishment, the result of her husband's illness and family disputes.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>30</sup> TNA PROB 11/199/426 and PROB 10/641/88.

<sup>31</sup> *Calendar of the Committee for Compounding*, part 2, p. 1207, 22 March 1655.

<sup>32</sup> *Cal Committee Compounding*, part 1, p. 90 and in *Staffordshire Incumbents*, described as living, 1648, p. 391, she had died by 1653, *Cal Cttee Comp*, part 2, p. 1207, 22 March 1655. Many sources state she died in 1613 but give no authority.

<sup>33</sup> Date of marriage in Bodl MS Wood F.33, f.139; TNA C142/706/5, (1627/28).

<sup>34</sup> His father's inquisition post mortem (1587) C 142/214/208 gave his age as 33; Staffs RO DK 603/K/1/6/34, March 1581.

<sup>35</sup> Sturgess, *Admissions to Gray's Inn 1521-1889*, admitted Feb 5 1583/84, p. 64; Adams, *Household Account. Books of Robert Dudley*, pp. 239, 425.

<sup>36</sup> Simon Adams, 'Because I am of this country...', Appendix II.

<sup>37</sup> Hasler, *House of Commons; Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1585-1586*, no. 766, p.702, from Ms Lansdowne 49, f.171.

<sup>38</sup> Foley IV, 219; HMSSC, *Salisbury*, vol. 18, (1940), pp. 34-35.

<sup>39</sup> Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary*, p. 337.

<sup>40</sup> TNA PROB 11/163/485; the marriage settlement, 26 Apr. 1592, C142/706/5, outlined her jointure, but not the dowry provisions.

September 1593 saw the death of Sir John Russell, former husband of Ralph's first-born, Elizabeth. She was finally free from his unpredictable behaviour. Two inquisitions post mortem were necessary, the first heard in London on 6 March 1594 and a second, concerning his Worcestershire estates, on 27 May 1594 in Worcester, fought by William Childe.<sup>41</sup> The jointure lands, a moiety of the manors of Eastham Burnells, Westham Burnells, East Westham and Playes, Essex, were only finally allowed to her in 1596.<sup>42</sup>



Ralph's daughter Frances, first wife of Anthony Mayney of Linton Kent, stands on the left of the monument. © Courtesy of Kath Cooper, Linton

Ralph's two youngest daughters were still unmarried. His eighth daughter, Frances, married Anthony Mayney of Linton, Kent, in mid-1594.<sup>43</sup> Anthony attended Cambridge university for a year, and was then admitted to the Inner Temple in November 1587.<sup>44</sup> He was probably aged around 28-9 on his marriage and would inherit an estate of 2000 acres. Frances died, probably in child birth, before 1603 when Anthony went abroad for an extended stay, and certainly before 1609 when he re-married.<sup>45</sup> There were no children. Catholic sympathizers, connections with his first wife's family were maintained and gifts made to friends in common in his will, written in 1627.<sup>46</sup> When his heirs erected a monument in Linton church around 1640 Frances' effigy was placed to his right.

Negotiations on behalf of his ninth daughter, Philippa, presumably called after Ralph's sister, seem to have been proceeding at much the same time. Philippa, her date of birth unknown, married John Sulyard of Wetherden near Haughley, Suffolk, a much

<sup>41</sup> *Abstracts of Inquisitiones Post Mortem for the City of London*: Part 3. 1593-4, pp 210-219 = C 142/241/126 (London), now on-line British History; at Worcester, 20 April 1594, C 142/239/124 and *CPR 1593-159*, L&I, vol. 309, no. 573.

<sup>42</sup> *CPR 1595-1596*, L&I, vol. 317 no. 527, C 66/1448, mm.3-4, 12 Feb. 1596.

<sup>43</sup> WAAS, The Hive, marriage bond of £100, 1594/28a, 30 May 1594. Usually thought to be Ralph's eighth daughter, her epitaph in Linton states she was Sheldon's seventh.

<sup>44</sup> Cooke, *Members ... Inner Temple*, p. 119, shorter version p.56; Thrush and Ferris, *House of Commons*; <https://www.scribd.com/doc/79845145/The-MAYNE-family-of-Kent-1550-1706>

<sup>45</sup> Thrush and Ferris, *House of Commons*.

<sup>46</sup> To Francis Plowden and to Sir Charles Cornwallis, TNA PROB 11/151/293.

penalized, steadfastly Catholic family.<sup>47</sup> The alliance seems an odd choice since John's father, Edward, was a staunch recusant not only paying fines since the 1570s, but in prison, where he still was, since 1588.<sup>48</sup> The preliminary negotiations were therefore carried out, and recorded by, Sheldon's old friend and voluminous correspondent, Sir Thomas Cornwallis, the bridegroom's relative. The idea had been proposed by late May 1592; Sheldon visited Cornwallis at Brome, Suffolk in June 1592.<sup>49</sup> <https://www.ralphsheldon1537-1613.info/pdf-pages/Sulyard-Marriage-negotiations.pdf> Details of the settlement were under discussion by January 1593. Sheldon was asked for a dowry of £2000 but demurred, offering only £1000, a sum which was accepted with little argument because the Sheldon family was seen to be more socially advantageous than a merchant or lawyer, the only other class of individual Cornwallis considered might make a comparable offer. The jointure was to be £100 immediately with a further £400 to follow after the death of her father in law and another £100 after her mother in law's demise.<sup>50</sup> The settlement took time to finalize; Sheldon delayed dowry payments. The marriage probably took place late in 1593 or in the very early months of 1594; an entry in Edward's notebook records the birth of his grandson (another Edward) on 9 November 1594.<sup>51</sup>

Ralph had finally fulfilled his obligations as a father. The marriages arranged, quite remarkably even-handed choices balanced across the religious divide, both reflected and buttressed his position in society. Those into the Flower and Sulyard families suggest support of a Catholic position; Peshall vacillated while alliances with the Trentham and Mayney families suggest accommodation with the established church. In particular, for Sheldon himself, the Mayney alliance strengthened 'neutral' contacts within the hierarchy of the English church. It brought kinship with Anthony Blencowe, a man who enjoyed wide connections almost certainly already known to him.<sup>52</sup> Provost of Oriel College, Oxford since 1574, his uncle was Sir Thomas Dudley, five times parliamentary nominee of the Dudley earls for Warwick.<sup>53</sup> Anthony had been Canon of Wells Cathedral since 1566, and Chancellor of the Diocese of Chichester from 1590.<sup>54</sup> In 1584 Blencowe had travelled north, together with Richard Eades, future dean of Worcester, and Toby Matthew, future Archbishop of York, to witness Matthew's induction into his new post as dean of Durham. Eades' entertaining, observant account of their journey included brief historical information about the places they passed which would have appealed to Ralph; it also contained some less than complimentary remarks about his travelling companion, Blencowe.<sup>55</sup> Eades' literary pretensions were more fully indulged when, by now Dean of Worcester, he composed a verse epitaph for William Sheldon's new tomb at Beoley. But the trio had been associated long

<sup>47</sup> John Sulyard (Sudyard) possibly abroad; mentioned 1591 in the confession of an informer, *CSPD 1591-94*, p. 151, no. 105(18), December 1591 probably belonged to a different family.

<sup>48</sup> Staffordshire Record Office, D641/4/J/4/3/1, 3-43.

<sup>49</sup> Bodl Ms Tanner 285, ff. 37, 27.

<sup>50</sup> Staffordshire Record Office, D641/4/J/4/1/3(b).

<sup>51</sup> Staffordshire Record Office, D641/4/3/2/2.

<sup>52</sup> Mayney's sister was married to Anthony's brother, George, Thrush and Ferris, *House of Commons*.

<sup>53</sup> Hasler, *House of Common*; Alan Davidson, 'Ralph Sheldon and the Provost of Oriel', pp. 22-27, which can now be much expanded.

<sup>54</sup> ClergyDatabase CCEd Person ID: 55594.

<sup>55</sup> An early example of English travel literature, Sutton, *Iter Boreale*.



before then. All were former Oxford students; Toby Matthew had been amongst the disputants at the queen's visit in 1566 and had delivered an oration at her departure.<sup>56</sup> He was subsequently appointed a royal chaplain; later, so too was Eades.<sup>57</sup> Blencowe would have known about the removal of his predecessor from Oriel, Roger Marbeck, another speaker at the queen's visit; his new career in medicine now saw him amongst the royal physicians.<sup>58</sup> Ralph had friends in the diocese and friends at Court.

When, in 1594 in the aftermath of the accusations against the queen's Portuguese physician Doctor Lopez of an attempt to poison her,<sup>59</sup> Sheldon came again to the alarmed notice of the privy council, it was in a context which perhaps puzzled them as much as it should puzzle us.

[Back to Contents >>](#)

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<sup>56</sup> *ODNB*.

<sup>57</sup> *ODNB*.

<sup>58</sup> *ODNB*; Furdell, *Royal Doctors*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>59</sup> Green, *Double Life of Dr Lopez*.