

Chapter Fifteen : Shifting Winds 1595-1603

Ralph had been fortunate. Serious charges against him had been dismissed; he had escaped penalties despite obvious breaches of the law. One might wonder whether he had perhaps been used as a pawn in Cecil's recent difficulties and sharp disagreements over the next appointment to the post of Attorney-General and that his role had been to serve the Cecils in some way. The supposition, and it is no more, is strengthened because two years later he would acquire lands, tithes and the advowson of Whichford, a parish close to his house at Weston. Formerly a property of the earls of Derby, the present earl had, by marriage, recently become a Cecil relative.¹ A natural expansion of Sheldon estates, one might wonder whether it is perhaps a bit too convenient and should be seen as an expression of gratitude.

Friendships

Another shadowy figure also emerges, one to whom it would seem Sheldon had been close despite absence of records. Robert Walter was the son of Sheldon's step-mother's steward; his father did business with Gabriel Goodman, dean of Westminster, and had wealthy merchant connections in the City.² Robert, educated at Westminster school, was described by their Lordships of the privy council in October 1589 as 'a man of service and good desert'.³ They also observed that he is 'known to have attended here in Court a long tyme to his great charge and without any advancement had'. Writing his will in November 1593, he appointed as his executors men who had all been members of the 1593 parliament he would have known well, Sir Thomas Wilkes, Mr Thomas Kerry, Mr Henry Maynard,⁴ and Mr Thomas Lake, Clerk of the Signet, an increasingly influential figure with whom Ralph enjoyed continuing friendship for many years.⁵ Robert saw no reason, despite the events of 1594, to change his appointment of Sheldon, father and son as Overseers or to withdraw his bequests. Ralph was to have Robert's 'greate quarter clocke', Edward his 'little pocket clock and one Booke conteyning all the Mappes of the Shires of England in Collors', presumably the *Atlas* compiled by Christopher Saxton, first published in 1579, regarded as a necessary tool for every civil servant.⁶ For both Sheldons the gift would have held special resonance; Saxton's maps had formed the basis for the cartoon for the tapestry maps.

Whether Walter's gesture expressed regard for a friend or was intended as tacit support, albeit posthumous, for Sheldon just when he needed it, Ralph showed his gratitude, and perhaps also his affection, by erecting a tomb to Robert in Steeple Barton church,

¹ TNA C 78/110/11, 9 May 1601, available on AALT.

² Barnett, *Place, profit and power*, pp. 44-46, 69.

³ *APC 18 1589-90*, pp. 178-9; Hasler, *House of Commons*, Robert Walter.

⁴ Whether it was from this man, a Cecil secretary, or another of the same name in Steeple Barton from whom Ralph borrowed money is unclear, CR 2632, f.127, Nov 1587 and C 2/Eliz/O1/46.

⁵ Thrush and Ferris, *House of Commons*; TNA PROB 11/86/266.

⁶ Conyers Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. I, 423-443, at p. 428, Robert Beale, *Treatise of the Office of a Counsellor and Principall Secretarie of Her Majestie*; Robert's will TNA PROB 11/86/266

Oxfordshire, their newly acquired property.⁷ Its inscription, placed between two simple pillars and surmounted by a coat of arms, read:

Ralph Sheldon of Bewley Esquire
 placed this testimony, such as it be, of a grateful soul,
 to Robert Walter, son of William by Catherine Leveson,
 a learned man and by nature the lover of learned men,
 outstanding in praise for judgement, energy, faith, constancy,
 wisdom, and industry in his friends' affairs,
 a good [and] very faithful secretary of Lord Burghley
 High Treasurer of England, not only to him but also
 to his family, since he, dead by apoplexy, has
 sadly left to these friends (whom he had come to see),
 [only] the longing for him.

It is a strangely emotional gesture to a friendship which has left no other trace and where fond exaggeration refers to an office the deceased is not known to have held. As well as being a longstanding friend Walter may also have been distant family with extensive/powerful contacts. His mother's maiden name was Leveson, member of the large Shropshire family from whom Ralph's brother had chosen his wife. Her executors were Dean Goodman, Mr Burden and Sir Thomas Cecil, the principal landowner in Wimbledon where the Walter family lived.⁸ Building a tomb would, of course, serve as a means for Ralph to ingratiate himself with William Cecil, and perhaps with others. Though the executors proved the will and contact with them might have been slight, it would have been hard to avoid entirely. Men who less than a year before had probably been familiar with the accusations against him were now meeting Ralph of necessity.

Ralph was seemingly unruffled by the recent personal events. He could relax a little. Around him lay the ostentatious display of and in his new house which emphasized the status of his family and, incidentally, his own. Acquisition of further estates enlarged and extended the basis of his heir's income and potential influence. Ralph could perhaps afford to disregard the hints of his difficulties which whispered after him in print perhaps seen only by a few, as 'an unthrift' who would have lost all his lands in gaming within these two years 'if he had not had faire play played him'.⁹ A year later Sir John Harington, the queen's godson and inveterate versifier, paid him a somewhat back-handed compliment, observing that less than two years before 'he had heard one that was a great courtier say that he thought Sheldon one of the sufficientest wise men of England and fittest to have been made one of the Council, but for one matter'.¹⁰

⁷ Bodl Ms Wood E.1, fo. 108v-109, with thanks to Mrs Hilary M Clare for her translation. The tomb was destroyed in C19 refurbishment of the church, *VCH Oxfordshire*, 11, Steeple Barton, pp. 59-75.

⁸ Katherine Walter, TNA PROB 11/72/84.

⁹ Scott-Warren, *The Book as Gift*, p. 91.

¹⁰ John Harington, *An Apology for Ajax*, 1596, (ed) E. S. Donno, *Harington's Metamorphosis of Ajax*, p. 240.

His religion, that ‘one matter’, might bar Ralph from office, but seems otherwise not to have troubled either Sheldon or the authorities greatly. Despite the recent suspicions he was treated, at least in law, as conforming. When in July 1596 Dr Bilson took up his appointment as bishop of Worcester, he identified 180 ‘recusants of note’, but did not include, or even hint, that Sheldon was amongst them, though he was very much of their ilk – the men the council feared as being ‘of good wealth but of great alliance... able to prevail much with the simpler sort’.¹¹ For the time being Sheldon could relax in the tacit acceptance of his decision to attend church, whether he did or not.

The evidence of the account book for journeys of 1200 miles or so in the years 1586 and 1588 shows how little Ralph thought of a punishing round of journeys. Now, aged 60, Sheldon was talking of a summer visit to Suffolk, a three-hundred mile round trip; Sir Thomas Cornwallis knew of it by May 1597.¹² It was much delayed, perhaps because of Sheldon’s need to keep watch on the moves of his restive tenantry at Brailes and necessary trips to London on legal or financial business. Only on 9 October did Cornwallis hear that Sheldon ‘purposed’ to be with him next day but ‘whether he will come by way of London or no he did not tell me’. Ralph’s son Edward, writing on the 23rd October to the Suffolk gentleman John Hobart, former secretary to Lord Paulet and their mutual business manager, said ‘My father is constant in his Souffolk journey where I make no question your company is desired.’¹³ Three days later Ralph himself also wrote to Hobart from Banbury, that ‘I do yet hold my purpose to vysyt my Sowffolk friends and the uttermost daye for the beginning of {my journey} is Wenesday (*sic*) come sevenight.¹⁴ By the 28th Cornwallis knew that Sheldon really was on his way.¹⁵ <https://www.ralphsheldon1537-1613.info/pdf-pages/Hobart.pdf>

Sheldon was travelling towards a group of congenial friends in contact with, and related to, each other. From the house of the now elderly Cornwallis Sheldon would be within reach of his own youngest daughter at Haughley. Her eldest child had been born more or less as Sheldon had been dismissed without charge two years previously; her father in law, Edward Sulyard, under house arrest and burdened with recusancy fines since 1582, was still required occasionally also to find money to provide horsemen for the army.¹⁶ At a greater distance lay Bruisyard, home of Michael Hare, one of those Ralph might have met first during the parliament of 1563, brother of the antiquary Robert. The group shared common interests; known subjects of conversation ranged over recently published books, building plans, coaches and coal. Cornwallis regarded Sheldon as something of an expert about the latter, sending a sample of the coal from a Yorkshire mine so that Sheldon could judge its quality.¹⁷

¹¹ HMssC, *Salisbury*, vol. 6, pp. 255-272, 17 July; also in Talbot, *Miscellanea*, CRS 53, p.127-29.

¹² Bodl Ms Tanner 185, f. 33.

¹³ Brown, ‘Paperchase’, 120-143; Bodl MsTanner 283, f. 160.

¹⁴ Bodl Ms Tanner 115, f. 58.

¹⁵ Bodl Ms Tanner 283, f. 6.

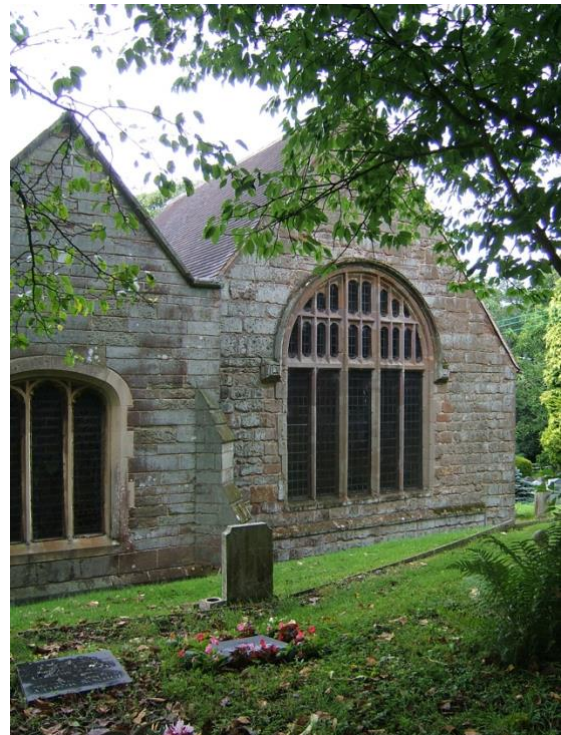
¹⁶ Staffordshire Record Office, D641/4/J/4/3, 3-30, 32,38, for horse at nos. 25, 34,-36.

¹⁷ Scott-Warren, ‘News, Sociability and Bookbuying in Early Modern England’ p. 396.

The taste and possessions of these men may have inspired Sheldon. A frieze of painted heads was displayed in the Hare's London house, later bequeathed to the Suffolk Catholic family of Timperley, perhaps giving Sheldon the idea of installing a similar frieze in his own Great Drawing Room.¹⁸ Timperley, related to Sheldon's friend, Sir John Goodwyn, had recently commissioned a map of his estate at nearby Hintelsham showing his house, as Sheldon would later do for Brailes.¹⁹ Cornwallis made repeated requests for books to be bought and despatched to him from London.²⁰ Ageing, perhaps having difficulty walking, he had implored Sheldon to seek advice on his behalf from Richard Hyckes, tenant at Barcheston and royal arrasmaker, about the construction of a carriage to make trips across his parkland more comfortable, taking advantage of Hyckes' experience of observing the construction and outfitting of the carriages ordered for the queen, their trappings manufactured within the Great Wardrobe.²¹ The group was at one in daring to show proper pride and respect for their forebears. Michael Hare built a small chapel onto the parish church at Bruisyard;²² Cornwallis had enlarged the aisle in his parish church at Brome to accommodate his own tomb and another for his father, giving orders that the latter's body should be transported from its temporary grave at Berkhamsted.²³

Creating the image

Though the family was no longer resident at Beoley the talk of his friends might have decided Ralph to enlarge the existing Lady Chapel in which grandfather Ralph had requested burial to create space to accommodate tombs for his ancestors, a natural sequel to the house at Weston, probably now complete, and a way to outshine grandfather Willington's modest chapel at Barcheston. The consent of the rector to this enlargement might not have been too hard to obtain, for the living was in Ralph's gift. Its creation was a major undertaking, requiring excavation of the hillside, demolition of existing internal walls and raising of its floor level above that of the aisle and chancel to provide a crypt-mausoleum below. Separated from the north aisle by a flight of steps, the chapel measured some 23



The east end of Beoley church; the distinctive stonework of Ralph's enlarged chapel is on the right. © Hilary L. Turner

¹⁸ Turner, 'Glimpses of a Gallery: the maps and 'paynted pictures' of Robert Hare'.

¹⁹ Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich branch, HA 167/3050/131, pictured in Shewell Corder, 'Hintlesham Hall', pp. 301-03. Turner, 'An Early Map of Brailes: 'fit symbolographie', now on-line.

²⁰ Scott-Warren, 'News, sociability, and bookbuying...' at pp. 398-99.

²¹ Munby, 'Queen Elizabeth's Coaches: p. 328 where Richard Hyckes has become Richard Kirke.

²² TNA PROB 11/117/410.

²³ TNA PROB 11/105/106.

ft. 11 in. by 20 feet. Work may have been nearing completion by 1598 when Ralph's long-serving steward, Robert Harpur, requested burial for himself in the north aisle, 'in the passage into my Master's chapel, that the said carcase may be a stepping stone for my Master and all his...'; he wanted his body to lie beneath the only access to the new chapel.²⁴ Ralph's final gift to the church was a bell, a look back to pre-Reformation customs. Inscribed with the date 1601 his name and those of the church wardens, it was cast in Leicester.²⁵ His Suffolk friends too left money in their wills for the same purpose.²⁶

The earliest of the magnificent tombs which furnished the chapel were those of great-uncle William and grandfather Ralph, put in place against the chapel's north wall in 1600 and 1601 respectively, complete with their informative painted panels.²⁷ The texts, now illegible, were later recorded by the Worcestershire historian, Treadway Nash.²⁸ On the opposite side, the chancel's inner wall separating it from the choir was pulled down, replaced by two elaborate table tombs probably commissioned from Southwark masons. Their canopies were topped by mantled arms, one for his father and mother, the other, in the position of honour closest to the altar, for his own first wife, Anne Throckmorton, and eventually himself. Both were embellished by a display of shields representing the marriages of their daughters.



The richly embellished canopied table tombs erected by Ralph Sheldon to commemorate himself, his wife and his parents; from Nash's *History of Worcestershire*, 1781. Courtesy of Ralph Richmond long-serving church warden at Beoley. © Hilary L. Turner

²⁴ TNA PROB 11/92/51, 6 July 1598. The door in the chapel's north wall was inserted only in 1890; it was never the family's private access to a private religious space.

²⁵ *Guide to St Leonard's Church*, Beoley. Cast by Hugh Watts of Leicester, stamped with an older, fifteenth-century stamp, the wardens were William Harpur and Nicholas ?Darlton; (?Daston). originally used by Brasyers of Norwich, Beoley *VCH Worcestershire*, 4, pp. 12-19; its cost is suggested by the figures below.

²⁶ From MacCulloch, *Archive 72*, p.252; Michael Hare left £30 to restore bells at Willingham and Thos Timperley gave £30 for the churchwardens of Hintelsham to buy a bass bell in 1594.

²⁷ Some damage was inflicted when the north door was inserted in 1890.

²⁸ Treadway Nash, *Collections for a History of Worcestershire*, vol 1, pp.68-70

Somewhat undistinguished verses still to be seen above his father's tomb were composed by the compulsive scribbler, Richard Eades, royal chaplain and Dean of Worcester cathedral since 1597.²⁹ Though a seemingly odd choice since Eades could not have known his honorand, it makes for an interesting comment on cross-doctrinal friendships, one which had perhaps been strengthened by the Sheldon alliance with the Mayney family.



The tomb Ralph built for his parents in the enlarged Lady Chapel in Beoley Church around 1601-02.

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Verses written by Richard Eades in praise of William Sheldon were placed at either end of his tomb in Beoley.

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Links with Oxford academics were strengthened by his grandson's attendance at Oxford University, many of them already long in being though absent from the record. Aged only 11, William was sent to Gloucester Hall in mid-January 1601;³⁰ he would have taken his degree and left the University long before the age at which he would have been required to swear the oath of Supremacy. Attending a college much favoured by Catholics, William's presence there suggests his grandfather's acquaintance with its president, the remarkable Thomas Allen, already existed.³¹ Resident in Oxford since 1561 when he first went up as an undergraduate and a Fellow before he became President, Allen's circle of Catholic contacts reached across England; his 250 surviving manuscripts, only part of his library, reveal his intellectual interests ranging over astrology and astronomy, history, medicine and theology. Another Oxford figure, Anthony Blencowe, would later spend time abroad with William. Together with the verse-writing Richard Eades Dean of Worcester, it may have been through Blencowe that Sheldon met the Protestant Sir Thomas Bodley, then planning his new Library in Oxford, 'an ark to save learning from deluge' as one contemporary observed.³² Eades' cousin, Thomas James, was Bodley's secretary and later his first librarian. By late August

²⁹ ODNB, Richard Eades.

³⁰ *Alumni Oxonienses*, 17 January.

³¹ Foster, 'Thomas Allen (1540-1632), Gloucester Hall and the Survival of Catholicism in Post-Reformation Oxford', remembered in Sheldon's will.

³² Clapinson, *A Brief History of the Bodleian Library*, Oxford pp.4-11, Francis Bacon.

1601, Bodley was sufficiently well acquainted with Ralph to request the services of Sheldon's 'chainman' to provide and fix the chains which would secure precious volumes to the new bookcases. The unimaginatively named John Smith was wanted at short notice for a specific date, but it was not until nearly a year later that he materialized, his chains ready fashioned. Three years later, his services were required a second time.³³

Gathering Problems

At home the long residence of Ralph's creditor Thomas Horde, first at Weston and later at Beoley, came to an end. The households were finally freed from the special care needed by an invalid and his petulant demands for entertainment.³⁴ Ungrateful to the last, he stormed away sometime in 1599, complaining that Sheldon's hospitality had been niggardly and penny-pinching. He had, however, learned a great deal about Sheldon's difficulties, information that could be used against his debtor. An astute judge of personal circumstances, his later remark that without his money Sheldon's estates would long since have failed was quite possibly close to the truth.³⁵ He had perhaps demanded repayment of the debt, now standing at around £20,000, or of part of the accumulating interest only to assure himself how little able Sheldon was to repay, already planning to foreclose. Horde may have given up hope of ever seeing his money again – or felt he had manoeuvred Sheldon into a corner from which he could not escape, the point at which legal proceedings for repayment could be considered, probably taking at least some of the estates into his control for repayment. He left behind the much bigger question of how that enormous sum, still rising, was to be repaid.



Chained books in Cheetham's Library, Manchester, similar to those provided by Sheldon's chain man for Sir Thomas Bodley's Library in Oxford.
© Nicholas T Turner

Numerous other law suits show a kinder side to Ralph's character, but they also reveal a streak of repeated, sometimes reckless, misjudgements, again in pursuit of income. In 1598 Ralph joined with his cousin, John Ashfield, to discredit a couple of tricksters.³⁶ In league with officers of the Oxfordshire sheriff, the latter had made an attempt to seize sheep, cattle and horses grazing on Ashfield's lands to meet Ashfield's debts; Sheldon claimed them as his

³³ Wheeler, *Letters of Sir Thomas Bodley*, 17, 40, 43-4, 47, 133, 138. Tyacke, 'The Schools Quadrangle at Oxford...', pp. 115-133; Clapinson, *Brief History*, p.11.

³⁴ TNA E 133/111/20, 21, 22.

³⁵ TNA C 2/Jas1/S22/51, sheet 1. https://www.ralphsheldon1537-1613.info/pdf-pages/Sheldon-v-Horde-C-2_JasI-S22_51.pdf

³⁶ TNA STAC 5/S58/35.

own.³⁷ The same year Ralph was listed amongst the recently deceased Sir William Catesby's many creditors, claiming £80 due for sheep purchased but not paid for.³⁸ Obscure negotiations with local landowners come to light in 1603 with Sir Alexander Temple (1583-1629), fourth son of John Temple of Stowe, and others when Ralph acquired an interest in the Oxfordshire manor of Heythrop, lying between his lands in the Glyme valley at Dean and Chalford and those of his son at Steeple Barton.³⁹

Ironically just as his Catholic friends were freed from prison, John Talbot and Thomas Throckmorton in November 1597, and, briefly, Edward Sulyard, on condition they continued to pay fines and the arrears they still owed, Ralph's position became more delicate.⁴⁰ After Cecil/Lord Burghley's death in August 1598 Ralph no longer escaped 'political' notice, suggesting again that, however distant, the family relationship to Burghley, had offered some degree of 'protection'. In February 1599 Ralph was relieved of a minor office he had held since 1580, that of chief steward of the royal manor of King's Norton, Warwickshire.⁴¹ At least occasionally he had carried out his duties, present when the manor court ratified a Chancery decision about disputed land.⁴² The following year, he was amongst the many Catholic gentlemen asked to 'lend' a horse to Her Majesty; her requirements were very specific:⁴³

Wee do therefore heereby lett you understand that her Majesty's pleasure is to require of you one light horse well furnished with a curasse,⁴⁴ a light horseman's staffe of a good and sufficient length, one pistoll, and especiallie a good sword, and withall a fitt and able man to serve on the same to be at Chester by the 25 of Julie next. From thence to passe into Ireland, which man and horse you shall but lende unto her Majesty's service, because it is intended that at the ende of this action now to be undertaken both the one and the other (God willing) shalbe returned unto you.

As so often, the war in Ireland was going badly and, no doubt every possible source of supply had to be tapped. This, however, was the first occasion on which Sheldon faced a demand which many Catholics, his friends and his sister included, had had to satisfy since 1585, even

³⁷ In all Sheldon was said to be grazing 393 sheep, 9 oxen, 18 horses and 8 rother beasts (plough animals) on Ashfield's lands as a means for Ashfield to repay a longstanding debt, declaring them as his own to avoid their seizure for Ashfield's liabilities. Son of his aunt Alice, daughter of grandad Ralph, John inherited land at Barford St Michael, where his mother was living at her death in 1573, presumably his mother's jointure (TNA PROB 11/55/167; WARD 7/9/7); around 1582/83 John married the widow of Humfrey Ashfield, owner of Heythrop (TNA C142/WARD 7/172/11; she was Anne, daughter of Thomas Smyth of Chipping Campden, TNA C 2/JasI/A3/68). When John failed to repay a loan into which he had been entrapped Ralph stepped in, not only lending him money but eventually becoming his guarantor (CR 2632, ff. 113, 199, 208, 220; TNA C 2/Eliz/O1/46). *Vis Warwickshire* 1619, p.165.

³⁸ TNA C 2/Eliz/B26/56.

³⁹ BAH MS 3061/1/364 (former 167764) *1 April 1603*.

⁴⁰ APC 28 1597-98, p.102 (6 November), p.167, (3 December). <https://www.ralphsheldon1537-1613.info/pdf-pages/Throckmorton.pdf>

⁴¹ *CPR 1598-99*, L & I, vol. 328, no. 281, C 66/1499, m.39-40 for the grant.

⁴² WAAS, The Hive, BA 8965/ 705.962/6/xvi; TNA C 3/217/76, C 3/217/77.

⁴³ APC 30 1599-1600, p.439, 29 June 1600. William Ligon, Edmund Colles and William Child received similar requests. All were Catholic sympathizers and Sheldon contacts, long associated with local administration.

⁴⁴ The equivalent of a flak jacket.

those already in prison and facing regular fines. But, insofar as technically at least Ralph was conforming, one might wonder what, or who, prompted the order. Taken together with the loss of an office, however minor, the request looks very like a warning, a reflection of a general hardening of suspicions about Catholics, in part a consequence of the shift of power to a younger generation, the changing composition of, and shifting divisions within, the privy council turned from its accustomed ways by Cecil's death.

If the request to provide a horse for the wars had indeed been intended as a warning, an even stronger reprimand followed fifteen months later after the long overdue announcement of elections for a Parliament, finally made early in September 1601. Delayed because of an attempt by the earl of Essex to inspire a rising in London against the government early in February, the need for the House of Commons to approve the levy of new taxation was pressing. Parliament was to assemble on 27 October.

The sharp rebuke came directly from the privy council seeking to make sure government candidates were elected, a process overseen and often controlled by the sheriff. In Worcestershire the sheriff was William Savage, Ralph's nephew.⁴⁵ One of the candidates was a local man, Thomas Russell, Sheldon's grandson by his daughter Elizabeth. Protestant, barely twenty-five years old and lacking experience he was teamed with the older, eminent Sir Thomas Leighton, involved in government for thirty years. Both were related to Sir William Knollys, son of the recently deceased long-serving privy councillor Sir Francis and himself Comptroller of the Queen's household and a privy councillor. Russell's claim was, admittedly, distant; it came through his cousin Margaret, the widow of Sir William's brother. Leighton, married to Sir Francis' daughter Cecilia, was Sir William's brother in law.

With only a day or two to spare before polling day on 14 October Ralph received the following letter, expressing the Council's fear that :

some undue proceedings may be used against Sir Thomas Leighton, especially out of animosity of religion which would greatly displease her majesty if she should be acquainted therewith; we thought it good to admonish you which are of judgement to have regard not to do yourself the wrong to be transported with any such passion....for that as any favour which should be conferred on the gentleman whom she doth so well esteem would be very agreeable to her majesty.⁴⁶

Signed by only two of the six members who had attended the meeting, some privy councillors had perhaps recalled his assistance to their candidates in 1588 and 1593, while memory that a Catholic sympathizer had been returned in the more recent election of 1597 may have prompted the council to think it advisable to warn him off, given his personal ties to some of those involved.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ He was the oldest son of Ralph's sister Anne by her first marriage *Vis'n Worcestershire* 1569, pp.124-25.

⁴⁶ *APC 32 1601-04*, p. 251; 7 October 1601.

⁴⁷ Neale, *The Elizabethan House of Commons*, pp. 295-6.

The letter's message was clear and as much a diktat to the local electors as it was a warning to Sheldon and Talbot. The council might seek to exert its influence against two men viewed, from London at least, as potential troublemakers; simultaneously it was 'informing' the local gentry that their 'choice' must light on Leighton. In an age when results could be, and were, overtly managed a battle between Council cliques was being played out in this parliament.⁴⁸

Their admonishment should perhaps be seen as a challenge to any protection conformity might be thought to offer, and an indication that for some in authority minimal, or even no, attendance at church was becoming less and less acceptable. An illustration of the clash between central and local interests, the fear of Catholic interests in the guise of Church Papacy in the council's mind was probably far stronger than the modern connection to recusancy. Memories of the pro-Catholic members chosen in 1597 perhaps prompted the warning; it also reveals the ambivalent attitude to the Church Papist and how little Sheldon's undertaking to conform was trusted even though he was no longer technically at least, a recusant.⁴⁹

Six days after their thinly disguised warning the privy council showed its teeth, once again ordering several prominent Worcestershire gentlemen, Sheldon amongst them, to provide a horse and rider for the army. This time there was no talk of a loan to the Queen and requirements were noticeably higher. The horse was to be 'a good horse or gelding' and to come with a 'morocco saddle of buffe or some other good leather and a good furniture to yt. A sufficient man to serve on him furnished with a good curasse and a caske, a northern staffe,⁵⁰ a good long pistol, a good sword and dagger and a horseman's coat of good cloth'.⁵¹ The cost imposed on the contributors, all with Catholic sympathies, was not likely to be less than £30.

The parliament itself was short-lived; assembling on 27 October, it was dissolved on 19 December. As the letter writer John Chamberlain observed on 14 November, 'the parliament handles no high matters... the alpha and the omega is concluded already: I mean the grant of four subsidies and eight fifteens' (taxes on laymen and clerics).⁵² Sir Robert Cecil described the Commons' behaviour as 'more fit for a grammar school than a Court of Parliament' and the session's high point, at least in retrospect, was the queen's two speeches, known now as the Golden Speech and the Closing Speech. They read now like Elizabeth's apologia for her actions.⁵³ Eighteen months later the Queen was dead.

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⁴⁸ Neale, *Elizabeth and her Parliaments, 1584-1601*, p.371.

⁴⁹ It is difficult to see it as an example of unfair treatment suffered as a Catholic as Morey, *Catholic Subjects of Queen Elizabeth*, p.140.

⁵⁰ In 1607 a morocco saddle was thought to be suitable for 'service in war', G. Markham, *Cavelarice* vi. 50; buff was leather of ox-hide, dressed with oil; a curasse was essentially a flak jacket, a caske a helmet and the northern staff might be either a club or a quarter staff.

⁵¹ *APC 32 1601-04*, pp. 275-86, esp. p.277, 282, 13 Oct 1601. The list also named Sir John Packington, William Lygon, William Washbourne, Edward Colles, former MP, and William Childe, former sheriff.

⁵² McClure, *Letters of John Chamberlain*, vol. 1, p.135.

⁵³ Graves, *Elizabethan Parliaments 1559-1601*, p. 67; Neale, *Elizabeth and her Parliaments, 1584-1601*, pp. 388-93, 428-31.