

Chapter Two : The Sheldon family in the Stour valley

Beginnings

The Sheldon family's first land-holdings were in Worcestershire. Penalized for having supported the losing, Yorkist, side in the Wars of the Roses Ralph's great-uncle William lost his minor post as a keeper of the royal park at Beoley (pronounced Beeley) north of Redditch.¹ He rebuilt his position, accepted into membership first of the Guild of Knowle and later of the Guild of the Holy Cross in Stratford upon Avon, associations for mutual self-help and gatherings of the influencers.² On the death of King Henry VII in 1509 he took the precaution of obtaining a pardon.³ When he died childless and suddenly in 1517, describing himself as being of Abberton, Worcestershire, he held the manor house and 200 acres of the demesne of Richard Neville first Lord Latimer at Beoley. He held other land nearby at Alvechurch, Northfield, Frankley and King's Norton, the latter of Queen Katherine of Aragon, the former of the troubled Sutton-Dudley family and Alvechurch of the bishop of Worcester. Twenty miles further south he owned twenty houses in Worcester and land spread over a triangle between Worcester, Alcester and Pershore which included Wadborough park, also held of Lord Latimer.⁴



The white rose of York, badge of the royal house of York to whom the Sheldon family owed allegiance, decorates Beoley church every year on the anniversary of the Yorkist defeat at Bosworth, 1485.

© Hilary L. Turner

¹ Noake, *Worcestershire Nuggets*, p. 143, reports that one Thomas Lowe was granted the office of keeper of the park of Beoley, then in the king's hands as guardian of Lord Latimer, a minor, with the same wages as William Sheldon had previously enjoyed in the post; Thomas Lowe, unidentified but possibly involved TNA C 241/275/45.

² Bickley, (ed), *The Register of the Guild of Knowle 1451-1535*, p. 101; MacDonald, (ed), *The register of the Guild of the Holy Cross, St Mary and St John the Baptist*, p.346.

³ *L&P Henry VIII, 1509-13* (1), no. 438, p.204; Pardon Roll, part 1, m.1. The frequent statement that he was pardoned only in 1517 is a mis-reading of his epitaph in Beoley church.

⁴ TNA C 142/33/37; PROB 11/18/575, 1517.

For his brother Ralph, married to a Warwickshire heiress, the inheritance was unexpected. He used his windfall, augmented by his wife's inheritance, to diversify his revenue sources; he bought salt bullaries in Droitwich, for status and a parliamentary vote, and coal diggings in Leicestershire for profit.⁵ Slightly later he negotiated long leases of monastery lands on astonishingly advantageous terms.⁶ Two of his four sons certainly traded in wool, Baldwin in Suffolk, William first in Leicestershire and later in Wiltshire.⁷ Another son, though bailiff in Worcester city where he owned extensive property, was under suspicion of having cheated the tax man and practised extortion against a prisoner due for release; he received his inheritance only on condition he moved to the isolated settlement of Child's Wickham then in Gloucestershire.⁸ Solid if unimaginative marriages were arranged for Ralph's five daughters.⁹ The injudicious elopement and alliance of his youngest was brought to a fortunate end by her husband's premature death, her misdoings, a bad example for William's own daughters, smoothed over by a second, respectable alliance into the widely connected Warwickshire gentry family of Ferrers.¹⁰ Ralph himself served as JP from 1532 and was twice listed as a possible candidate for the post of sheriff in 1540 and 1541. When he died he described himself as being of Abberton but he requested burial in the lady chapel at Beoley to the accompaniment of a sung mass.¹¹

Grandad Ralph and his son William were both office holders in Worcestershire and most of the family lived in the county. For them, the gated Beoley manor house, its garden and its lands was honoured as the starting place of the family's status. Baptisms, burials and some marriages took place in the parish church; the lady chapel in which grandad Ralph had requested burial was altered and enlarged by his grandson and was treated as the family mausoleum, but the house, its now forgotten site on the hill above the great Cistercian monastery of Bordesley on the outskirts of modern Redditch, was slowly abandoned. Less and less frequently inhabited by the senior branch it had ceased to be their main residence even before the end of the sixteenth century. By the time grandson Ralph reached his majority the greater part of the family's lands lay in the open Warwickshire countryside, acquired because they brought greater returns than the steep wooded hills of north Worcestershire and were free of feudal controls.

⁵ Birmingham Heritage and Archives (BAH) MS 3061/1/277, 1530; BAH MS 3061/1/206,1529; BAH MS 3061/1/53, Dec 1528, damaged; coal TNA C 1/892/23.

⁶ Flyford Flavell, recited on its expiry, *CPR 1572-75*, no.3224; Childs Wickham TNA E 164/39, fos.403-403v for 84 years in 1535 and Bishampton and Wadborough, mentioned in Grandfather Ralph's will 1546, PROB 11/31/403.

⁷ MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors*, p. 301; TNA REQ 3/27.

⁸ *L & P Henry VIII*, 1544 (2), pp. 186-7, no 340 (35); TNA REQ 2/4/326; an appeal by Thomas, *L&P Henry VIII*, 1533, p. 401, no. 929(i), July, against a judgement passed against him, *L&P Henry VIII*, 1540-41, p. 292, no. 617(ii). Father's will, TNA PROB 11/31/403.

⁹ William Lench of Wick, John Fox and secondly Anthony Ashfield according to Bodl. MS Wood F.33, f.139; John Rugeley, William Gower of Redmarley and George Ferrers of the Baddisley Clinton family.

¹⁰ TNA STAC 2/20/94 and STAC 2/25/197; *Vis 'n Warwickshire* 1619, pp. 2-3, for Mary's place in the Sheldon genealogy.

¹¹ TNA PROB 11/31/403 proved 11 Feb 1547 as Rauffe.

Expansion

The family's expansion from their initial holdings in north Worcestershire into south Warwickshire began when Ralph's father, William, married Mary, daughter of the wool merchant William Willington around 1526. Purchaser of Barcheston manor, its lands (755 a.) extending over half the parish, Merchant of the Staple with offices in Calais and in London, Willington's openly expressed intention was to raise his seven daughters into the gentry class through marital alliances. His money would be welcome, his ambition gratified.¹² Something else, however, must have attracted him to William Sheldon, probably born c. 1500; his family though adequately provided with land and with an interesting industrial portfolio had not yet quite made their mark amongst the gentry. Unlike the other husbands Willington chose William had completed a legal training at the Inns of Court in London. Moreover, as the eldest son, he already had expectations.

In 1533 the purchase of the 300 acre Warwickshire estate of Weston in Long Compton, site of a deserted settlement so common in the area, was financed jointly by both fathers.¹³ In 1546 William received permission to empark the grounds, possibly a neat answer to the continuing allegations that its previous owner, the Coventry merchant Henry Keble, had forced the villagers out of their homes.¹⁴ His death, without an obvious heir, had left the question unresolved and the estate something of a liability for his executors.

Once in independent possession of land William Sheldon too became eligible for selection as JP, the first step to social recognition in the county, in this case Worcestershire. He would serve there from 1532 for the next thirty-five years with a short spell in Warwickshire. He was elected as a Worcestershire MP three times, in 1542, 1547 and 1555, thus serving under three monarchs, Henry, Edward and Mary.¹⁵ It was, however, chance which gave him his biggest opportunity. After the revolt in the North in 1536, now called the Pilgrimage of Grace, Katherine Neville, better known to us as Katherine Parr, sixth wife of Henry VIII, and her first husband left his estates in the north of England; they came to live on their property at Wick near Pershore. Her household needed officers; William became one of them, serving as Katherine's solicitor in questions over her jointure when, after her husband's death, she caught the sovereign's roving eye.¹⁶ In virtue of that marriage she briefly became overlord of the lands the Sheldons held at King's Norton, as Queen Catherine of Aragon had been before her, one of three overlords whose actions benefited the family. Relations with Katherine Parr's stepsons, the Neville family third and fourth Barons Latimer, continued though not without tensions, even after their sale of the manor of Beoley to William Sheldon

¹² TNA PROB 11/42B/641; <http://tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/WilliamWillington.pdf>

¹³ WaCRO CR 456 boxes 22, 23. His father's will, however (TNA PROB 11/31/ 403 as Rauffe), records that he had bought the manor for his son.

¹⁴ *L & P Henry VIII*, vol. 19 (ii), 1545, 846 (34); in July 1549 William secured exemption from all charges on the land except for a rent of 6s., *CPR 1548-49*, p. 352.

¹⁵ Biography, accurate only on offices held, Bindoff, *House of Commons 1509-1558*.

¹⁶ James, *Catherine Parr*, p. 125 where Sheldon is incorrectly described as 'of London'; his purchase called Shraveley is now Shrawley Wood, Worcs; TNA E 315/161/38; E 101/423/15, f.8.

in 1549 and of Wadborough early in the 1560s.¹⁷ The third overlord, the Sutton-Dudley family, had been forced by debt to sell their estates to their more influential cousin, John Dudley, son of a royal administrator who rose steadily in influence and position through Henry's reign.¹⁸ For a time resident at Dudley Castle, Worcestershire, proximity brought the Sheldon family a connection, perhaps as early as 1548. Subsequently ennobled first as earl of Warwick and then as the duke of Northumberland Dudley opposed Protector Somerset's guardianship of the under-age King Edward VI, eventually himself becoming the dominant force until his attempt to put his daughter in law on the throne in place of Mary Tudor. The Sheldon family survived the difficult aftermath of his execution in 1553; William had become close enough, and was considered sufficiently useful, later to marry the sometime mother in law of Dudley's fourth son, Ambrose, an alliance which brought William both lands and standing. For his son Ralph that relationship would prove to be double-edged when Ambrose and his brother Robert, subsequently ennobled by Queen Elizabeth as earls of Warwick and Leicester respectively, occupiers of high offices of state, could wield their influence against him.

Aware that his father's estate would have to be divided between four sons William embarked, with his brother Francis, on large scale purchases of former monastery lands, profiting, like so many others, from the dissolution of the monasteries; in all they made an investment of £5437 in lands, woodland and mills which came on the market including three parcels of land in Beoley formerly owned by Thomas Cromwell.¹⁹ Many of their purchases, including rights to tithes and advowsons, lay in south Worcestershire where they used the opportunity to create a compact block of agricultural and forest acreage by consolidating the scattered holdings acquired by his father and uncle. Further afield however, and also with fore-knowledge of the coming inheritance from his mother, William acquired estates at Combe Baskerville on the Gloucester-Oxfordshire borders, facilitated by a contribution of £800 from his father in law William Willington towards their cost.²⁰

As the eldest son William inherited the largest share of the family's estates after his father's death in 1546, greatly increasing his status. It also gave him the use of Beoley, when previously he had lived at Weston, only four miles from his father in law's property at Barcheston, almost certainly his wife's birthplace. Some at least of their own offspring were born at Weston, their names entered in the parish registers of Long Compton; newly-instituted in 1538, their introduction came too late for Ralph's birthdate to be entered.²¹ It, like those of his three elder sisters, is unknown; since in 1571 he was said to be in his 33rd year, the deduction is that he was born around 1537.²²

¹⁷ TNA C 2/Eliz/L5/37.

¹⁸ Adams, 'Because I am of this Countrye...', p. 29, nn.55, 63.

¹⁹ *L & P Henry VIII*, vol 19 (i)1544, Jan. g 80(50), pp.43-4; Feb. g 141 (12), p.77; vol 19(2) Nov. g 340(9), p.179, g.340 (57), p. 193; *L&P*, vol. 20(2) Aug. 1545 g.266 (7), p. 118; *L&P 1546*, vol 21(1), g. 302 (30), p.148; g.302(65), p. 151.

²⁰ Will of Willington, TNA PROB 11/42B/642; Westcote, *VCH Gloucestershire*, 6, 172-178, makes no mention of this.

²¹ Bodl MS Wood, F. 33, f. 139 named two short-lived sons, Edward baptized 15 April 1538 and John baptized 12 July and buried 15 July 1540; Francis, his date of birth unknown was buried at Beoley 27 January 1541.

²² TNA WARD 7/13/135.

Although in 1561 William would settle at his most recently acquired property, Skilts, a former monastic grange of Studley Priory, he had meanwhile been active in the Stour valley.²³ On its western side, along the Knee Brook stream rising close to Chipping Campden where William already claimed property,²⁴ he looked to the future with almost indecent haste, negotiating first a lease then the purchase of land adjacent to that acquired from the same owner (in need of a quick sale) by his father in law Willington.²⁵ He had dealings with the bishopric of Worcester, held then by his relative Nicholas Heath, future archbishop of York and Queen Mary's Lord Chancellor, acquiring a block of land in Over (also Upper) Ditchford in 1550.²⁶ Negotiations with William Palmer of Lemington in 1556 gave Sheldon further land lower down the Knee Brook valley while, on the far side of the Stour, he also bought Palmer's land in Brailes.²⁷ The transaction doubled his holdings within the manor of Brailes purchased in 1547.²⁸ He inherited further small parcels of land there after Willington's death in 1555. His acquisition of Barcheston was contentious; William's legitimate claim that in 1536 he had been promised it after Willington's death was validated only in 1564 after a lengthy challenge to the will and a legal battle against his brothers in law which also involved bargaining over still further Knee Brook assets.²⁹ At his death, with only two sons to provide for, William bequeathed a small part of his property to his second son, the park at Wadborough south of Worcester appropriated from the lands of his uncle Henry's son who died without heirs in 1558.³⁰ Two much larger blocks passed to Ralph, the north Worcestershire estates, predominantly woodland, and those in south Warwickshire, open, largely grazing land previously in secular ownership.³¹ Their differing soils and products provided different income streams.

Ralph's younger years

Born so soon after the start of the Reformation, Ralph grew up against a background of shifting religious doctrine. The little changed liturgical arrangements of King Henry VIII underwent radical revision under his heir, King Edward but returned to the older ways under his successor, his half-sister Queen Mary. The accession in 1558 of Henry's younger daughter, Queen Elizabeth, brought the cautious compromise between conflicting opinions known now as the Anglican settlement. Ralph's grandfathers had both guardedly approved of

²³ *CPR 1558-60*, 1 April 1560, p. 370; Tyack, *Warwickshire Country Houses*, 1994, p. 264; Dugdale, *Antiquities*, p.741.

²⁴ See three cases against Sir Thomas Smyth, TNA STAC 3/1/103, STAC 3/4/32, STAC 3/32/150.

²⁵ It also included a Wiltshire estate, Market Lavington, acquired by Willington in 1543, BAH MS 3061/1/404.

²⁶ *CPR 1549-1551*, p. 194, land called Ditchford Leasowe and a meadow called Launceham.

²⁷ BAH MS 3061/1/500, 1560; MS 3061/1/284, *November 1584*.

²⁸ *CPR 1547-49*, p. 221-22, site of the manor, of 1000 acres pasture, 300a. furze & heath, 2 mills and a coney warren; also TNA LR 2/185, f. 225. Another part was acquired from Thomas Wymbush BAH MS 3061/1/232, (former 167632) 5 March 1546/7.

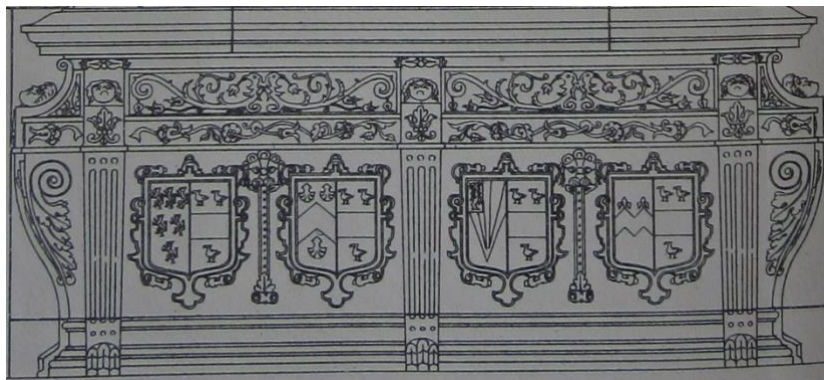
²⁹ WaCRO CR 580/9/38, 14/2; TNA C78/14, 36, C 78/33/30, C 78/36/27, C78/39/15, available on AALT, Anglo-American Legal Tradition.edu. For the quarrel see <http://tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP33BIOGWmS.pdf>

³⁰ TNA PROB 11/53/79 and WARD 7/13/135; nephew John TNA WARD 7/102/65.

³¹ TNA PROB 11/53/79; WARD 7/13/135.

King Henry's actions, although in 1536 Willington had set out arrangements for a chantry priest to say prayers for his soul in a small chapel added to Barcheston church and ten years later Grandfather Ralph had requested the full rites of a Catholic burial.³² William Sheldon himself was unafraid to support increasingly more Protestant tendencies. He undoubtedly proved himself a capable and a useful local receiver and then redistributor of forfeit monastic and chantry lands. Somewhat surprisingly he lived through Queen Mary's reign without penalties, remaining a collector of taxes throughout, though he took the precaution of selling his office in the Court of Augmentations, the agency responsible for overseeing the sale of monastic lands taken into the King's hands.³³ On Elizabeth's accession he sued out a general pardon for himself and for Ralph, a cautionary measure against being held responsible for crimes unwittingly committed.³⁴ He continued to serve in local administrative posts, acting also in a number of capacities for the newly ennobled earl of Leicester as he claimed properties in the county and making sure that Ralph came to the earl's attention.³⁵ Though William's loyalty to the Crown was beyond question, that to the Church might be acceptably firm, but was unenthusiastic. He was described in 1564 as 'indifferent', meaning a man of neutral feelings and the safe pair of hands needed in a local official.³⁶ William's funeral procession in January 1571 was led by a Herald, the first public display of the recently awarded coat of arms, a statement of his own position and a means to avoid doctrinal commitment.³⁷

By the mid-1550s good marriages had been arranged for three of William's four daughters, Ralph's sisters. Only one, Anne the eldest, married locally, first into the Savage family of Broadway and secondly to Anthony Daston of Dumbleton.³⁸ She would later host Queen Elizabeth at Elmley Castle in 1575. Philippa moved to Oxfordshire when she married Anthony Pollard, younger brother of a former House of Commons Speaker.³⁹ Katherine married the staunchly



The coats of arms of William Sheldon's daughters carved on his tomb from a drawing of 1888, by H. H. McConnal and W. H. Kendrick.
Left - Right: Francis Savage & Anne Sheldon; Anthony Pollard & Philippa Sheldon; Robert Brayne & Godith Sheldon; Edmund Plowden & Katherine Sheldon

³² WaCRO CR 580/13; TNA PROB 11/31/403 proved 11 Feb 1547 as Rauffe.

³³ *CPR 1554-1555*, p. 76-77, 262, 28 March 1555.

³⁴ *CPR 1553-54*, p. 457, November 1553; *CPR 1558-60*, p. 210; it described Ralph as of Beoley and the Middle Temple. William also sought a pardon for himself, *CPR 1558-60*, p. 176.

³⁵ Adams, 'Because I am of that Countrye...', esp. 31, n.77, n.232. William served as sheriff of Worcestershire in 1547-8, 1556-7 and 1567-8.

³⁶ *CPR 1560-63*, p.444; Bateson, (ed), 'A Collection of Original Letters...', p.6.

³⁷ College of Arms, London, MS Vincent 90, f. 209.

³⁸ 26 November 1546; Chambers, *Faculty Office registers*, p 285; date given as 26 November and as 7 December by Wood, Bodl MS Wood F.33, f.139. *Vis'n Warwickshire 1619*, p. 3; Barnard, 'The Savages of Broadway', pp. 43-57.

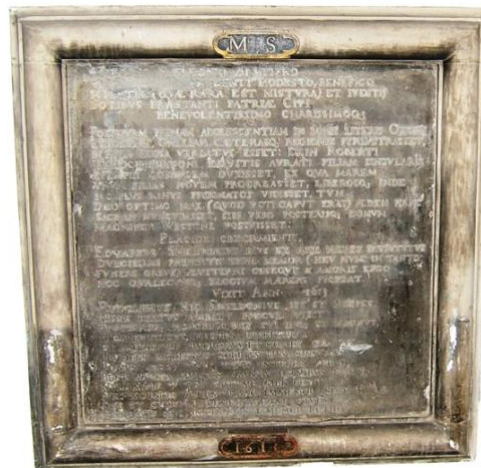
³⁹ Bodl Ms Wood F.33, f.139 gives date as 17 August 1551.

Catholic Shropshire jurist, Edmund Plowden, both later commemorated by a fine tomb in the Temple church, London.⁴⁰ Ralph's younger sister Godith was married only in 1558, first to a Bristol merchant, Robert Brayne and, after his death around 1571, to John Seymour, illegitimate son of Admiral Thomas Seymour, third husband of Katherine Parr.⁴¹

The death of their mother Mary in January 1553 placed the sixteen year old Ralph, his younger brother and briefly also his youngest, still unmarried sister into the common situation of acknowledging a step-mother, one who brought more advantages to William than to his children.⁴²

Ralph's position is less well mapped than that of his sisters and events in his youthful years are unclear. A plaque, probably much later in date than its composition attributed to his son would suggest, provides some information about his life. Parts, however, are questionable and should long since have

raised doubts.⁴³ Praising his great wisdom modesty, kindness, and noting his knowledge and judgement the inscription goes on to state that at his death he had 138 descendants, a figure no family genealogy sustains; it was claimed he had studied at Oxford, a statement unsupported by University or College records; that he travelled abroad in France and elsewhere (an unlikely itinerary for a Protestant in the 1550s and un-necessary for a Catholic) although, as a recently discovered reference suggests, with a different destination and a suspect purpose, possibly true nonetheless.⁴⁴ The plaque omits the mundane if more practical fact that in 1556 Ralph was enrolled at the Middle Temple of the Inns of Court in London.⁴⁵ The next year, then aged 20/21 he was married in London at St Andrew's Holborn to Anne Throckmorton, daughter of Sir Robert of Coughton Court by his first wife, a staunchly Catholic family.⁴⁶ One of sixteen children, her wider family, holding diverse doctrinal opinions, was numerous, far-flung and with extensive land holdings in several counties; some of her uncles were office-holders in successive governments. For Ralph whose upbringing had been more Protestant than Catholic it seems an odd alliance, but the Throckmortons of Coughton had dominated Warwickshire politics from the late fifteenth century and were already related through grandfather Willington.



Ralph's epitaph in Beoley church, much worn.
© Hilary L. Turner

⁴⁰ Exact date unknown; said to be around 1552, Parmiter, *Edmund Plowden An Elizabethan Lawyer*; she died c. 1582.

⁴¹ Married 2 March 1557/8, Beoley Par Registers; Wood's genealogies ignores her existence; TNA PROB 11/53/133; Maclean, 'History of the Manor and Advowson of Staunton in the Forest of Dean', pp. 237-44 at 237-8.

⁴² Dugdale, *Antiquities*, 1730 edition, I, p.584.

⁴³ Treadway Nash, *Collections*, p.71.

⁴⁴ Reference to 'young Sheldon' occurs in letters between Sir Philip Hoby and Edward Courtenay in 1555, *Cal State Papers Venetian 1555-56*, nos 284-5. The identification with Ralph is not clear and should not be regarded as fact.

⁴⁵ Sturgess, *Register of Admissions to the Middle Temple*, vol. i, sv anno 1556.

⁴⁶ 16 May 1557, TNA WARD 7/ 13/135; *Vis 'n Warwickshire 1619*, pp. 87-89.

Divided doctrinal opinion within the same family was far from uncommon and William may have viewed the alliance almost as an insurance policy – one of its members was always likely to have influence sufficient to offer protection to family members in trouble even though Sir Robert had to retire from positions held under Mary.

Probably in 1562, and possibly with the help of Ambrose Dudley, Ralph acquired a lease of a Crown estate in Brailes, giving him a huge holding in a large parish.⁴⁷ More significantly, next year he sat in Parliament for Worcestershire at least in the first session of two, taking the place of his father.⁴⁸ In theory, legislation against Catholics would have prevented him attending the second sitting not held until 1566.

The birthplace of Ralph's first child, his daughter Elizabeth, is unknown. The names of the following four children, the next two christened Mary and Edward, a tactful nod to the Tudor sovereigns, appear in Beoley parish registers.⁴⁹ The move to Weston seems to have occurred only around 1580; it would remain his base for the rest his life and for his descendants. It is unclear what the house was like before he began to re-build, or perhaps only extend, an older property; the account book shows expenditure on fittings and workmen 1586-88.⁵⁰ Much of the nearby land was his. From Weston's hill top site and from many other points on lands which belonged to Ralph it was possible to see Brailes Hill. From its summit Ralph could just make out the low bank which marks the course of the river Avon between Milcote and Evesham, beyond which lay the second group of estates acquired by great-uncle William and his brother, grandad Ralph, much closer to, and convenient from, Beoley. Though Ralph still had interests there he was most active along the Stour and southwards into Oxfordshire where he leased a property in Deddington.

Ralph's inheritance, however, came at a price. Mistrustful, his father's will gave the revenues from nine manors to his five executors to pay debts, a standard way to clip the heir's wings; Ralph was to receive an annual allowance of £200 and threatened with disinheritance if he tried to contest the provisions. Other stipulations forbade Ralph to re-empark lands at Beoley, compelled him to accept the use of Barcheston manor house to set up a weaving enterprise at least for a limited period and to continue to allow the Leicestershire coal diggers to buy fuel at reduced rates, thus withdrawing part of the yield from the open market. Innumerable cash gifts had to be paid out to family members and covenants honoured.⁵¹

Ralph did, however, also inherit, and would later enlarge, a second power base in the Stour valley in the unusual form either of holding the right to present the rector to a parish or an entitlement to a share in its tithes, theoretically payable to the rector and ensuring his salary.⁵² In this connection he was familiar with Tredington, one of the wealthiest parishes in the diocese and Stretton on Fosse; though he lost rights at the tiny settlement of Burmington, he instead acquired by purchase those at Barcheston in the 1580s and those at Whichford around 1597.

⁴⁷ The grant is not known.

⁴⁸ Hasler, *House of Commons*, an outdated and inaccurate account.

⁴⁹ Bodl MS Wood F. 33, f.139.

⁵⁰ See Chapter Twelve.

⁵¹ Transcribed at http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/Probate/PROB_11-53-79.pdf

⁵² See Chapter Ten.

Though matters in settlements along the Stour might be at the centre of Ralph's immediate concerns between 1586 and 1588, half the year was spent elsewhere. His possessions in the area did not mark the full extent of his lands or the full range of his interests or contacts. Neither could the area satisfy all his needs as the father of nine daughters, for each of whom Ralph needed to find a husband and for his son, a wife. His connections, and his obligations, public or personal, stretched well beyond the valley's limits, explaining the many reasons for his very extensive journeys.

Sheldon's Diary 1586-1588

Colour Key: colour bands represent consecutive days travel. Green = London trips; fawn = absences elsewhere

1586 30 September – 31 December 93 days					
Weston, Beoley			Away including Deddington		
Dates		Total Days	Dates		Total Days
30/9-2/11	Weston ⁵³	33			
			3/11-2/12	London	30
3/12-28/12	Weston	26			
			29/12-1/1/'87	Sudeley	4
3-month totals					
TOTAL DAYS 59			TOTAL DAYS 34		
1587 1 January – 31 December 365 days					
2/1-8/1	Weston	7			
			9/1-13/1	Quarter Sessions, Worcester	5
14/1-2/2	Weston	20			
			3/2-19/2	London	17
19/2 -28/3	Weston	39			
			29/3-3/4	Kidderminster-Sudeley	6
4/4-7/4	Weston	4			
			8/4-12/4	Spetchley-Worcester Assizes - Sudeley	5
13/4-18/4 ⁵⁴	Weston	6			
			19/4-21/4	Faringdon-?Salford or Oxford	3
22/4-30/4	?Weston	9			
			01/5-3/5	Abberton-Salford	3
4/5-7/5	Weston	4			
			8/5-31/5	London	24
1/6-8/6	Weston	8			
			9/6-12/6	Sudeley-Salford	4
13/6-15/6	?Weston	3			
			16/6-16/7	London	31
17/7-19/8	Weston	34			
			20/8-2/9	Long leg to Leicester	14
3/9-6/9	Weston or Beoley	3			
			6/9-7/9	Sudeley,	2
8/9-9/9	Weston	1			
			9/9-14/9	Spetchley-Worcester, Assizes	6

⁵³ According to TNA STAC 5/H31/35 sheet 3 he was briefly at Bromsgrove within this period.

⁵⁴ Ralph might possibly have been at Beoley in this period.

15/9-17/9	? Beoley	3			
			18/9-26/9	Brackley, Wrest, Wing or Dorton	9
27/9-11/10	Weston	15			
			12/10-15/10	Kidderminster+	4
16/10-22/10	Weston [B & W?]	7			
			23/10-6/12	London	45
7/12-21/12	Weston	14			
			21/12-31/12	Xmas at Deddington ?	11
Year's Total					
TOTAL DAYS 176			TOTAL DAYS 189		
1588 Leap Year 1 January – 29 September 273 days					
1/1-11/1	Deddington +?Weston	11			
			12/1-18/1	Sudeley et al	7
19/1-15/2	Weston	28			
			16/2-26/2	Salford-Inkberrow	11
27/2-22/3	Weston ⁵⁵	25			
			23/3-30/3	Northern Loop ⁵⁶	8
31/3-3/4	Weston or Beoley	4			
			4/4-?8/4	Sudeley	5
9/4-15/4	Weston	7			
			16/4-18/4	Malvern & Pixham Ferry	3
19/4-24/4	Weston conjectural	6			
			25/4-23/5	London	29
24/5-5/6	Weston ⁵⁷	13			
			6/6-28/6	London	23
29/6-8/8	Weston	41			
			9/8-11/8	Throckmorton-Abberton	3
12/8-17/8	Weston	6			
			18/8-30/8	Stratford then Worcester loop	13
31/8-1/9	Weston	2			
			2/9-10/9	St Albans- London	9
11/9-12/9	Weston	1			
			12/9-13/9	Cornbury	2
			14/9-17/9	Clopton-Salford	4
18/9-29/9	Weston	12			
9-month totals					
TOTAL DAYS 156			TOTAL DAYS 117		

[Back to Contents >>](#)

⁵⁵ Letter to Standen from Weston dated 22 March 1588, LM/COR/3/419.

⁵⁶ This trip might have ended at either Beoley or Weston.

⁵⁷ It appears to have been Mrs Sheldon, not Ralph, at Skilts, Milcote and Stratford 24/5-2/6, CR 2632 ff. 188-190.