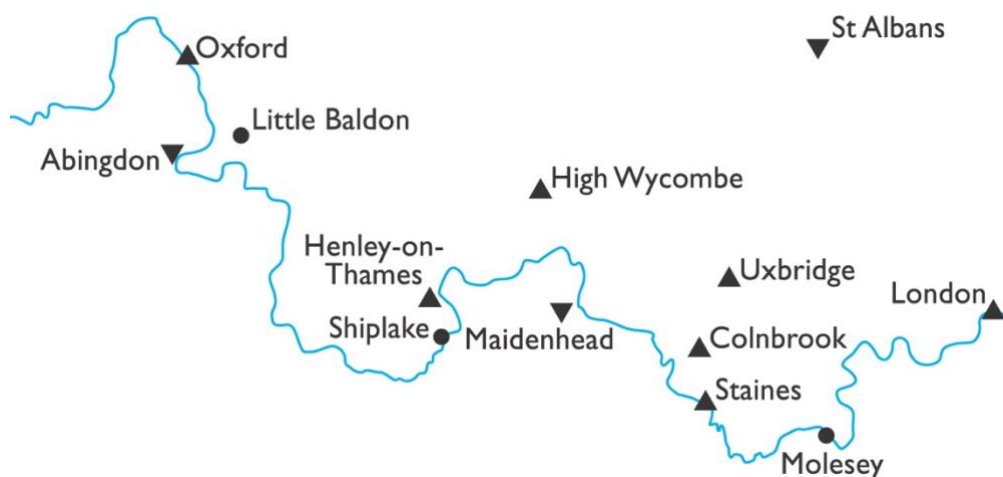


Chapter Four : London interests

Routes and Reasons

The structure of Ralph's year was determined by visits to London, some seventy miles from Weston and a three day ride. In all, he made eight in the two years covered by the accounts; one in the three months of 1586; four in 1587 and three in 1588.¹ Their length varied from three to six weeks. Only one might not have been entirely of his choosing; the others served his own purposes. Most were dictated by the law terms and coincided with their start; all covered several weeks in those terms. Six of those journeys share purposes in common: the pursuit or initiation of law suits, the payment of rents to an institutional landlord for himself and on behalf of others, the arrangement of loans, and shopping, whether for luxuries and delicacies not available in the country or for products which required the specialized craftsmen only to be found in the metropolis. His last two trips, one before, the other after the Armada's appearance, were noticeably shorter than the others and very much more personal in character.

Prominent in two counties, Warwickshire and Worcestershire in virtue of his estates, in London Ralph became just one of many thronging its dirty, narrow streets and, more particularly, its law courts and their back-room offices. Independent in the country, in London he became dependent on connections some of which originated in the past, with his father's lengthy service to the Crown; with only a few exceptions, his own were less august. Ralph was not, however, a stranger to London streets. He had attended the Inns of Court between 1556 and 1558, married in St Andrew's Holborn and for the three months it sat been a member of parliament in 1563.² He had even had a brief acquaintance with the Marshalsea prison followed by house arrest with the dean of Westminster in 1580 and again with William Waad in 1594.³



¹ By river: May-June 1587 both ways, October-December 1587; April-May 1588; via Somerton, St Albans and Putney September 1588; via High Wycombe November 1586 and back; February 1587 both ways, June-July 1587 both ways, June 1588, return journey in September 1588.

² It is unknown whether he returned for that Parliament's second sitting in 1566. If he had not been willing to take the Oath of Allegiance, he would have been debarred.

³ *APC 12 1580-1581*: pp.156, 254-55; *CSPD 1591-94*, p.544, no. 87; *TNA, SP 12/249*, f. 145r-146r.

Once beyond the easy ride to Oxford, Ralph had a choice of two routes. He could follow the river Thames, starting or finishing his journey by boat from Dorchester on Thames, the river's upper navigable limit, and stopping off at Henley, Maidenhead or Staines. This choice gave him opportunity to stay with his sister Philippa Pollard at Toot Baldon, some four miles beyond Oxford, to call on his nephew Francis Plowden at Shiplake and to play bowls in Henley - which he did on several occasions, presumably to stretch cramped muscles.⁴ The journey might also be broken by an overnight stay at Maidenhead or dinner at Staines or Windsor. He used this route six times, sometimes returning by the alternative route. More often taken, this followed approximately the line of the later turnpike, superseded by that of the modern A40. Halts were made usually at High Wycombe, probably at Wooburn with his brother in law Goodwyn, before continuing through Uxbridge and Hillingdon. On one occasion he rode down the now virtually forgotten river Colne to pick up a boat at Colnbrook to continue downstream by water. On other occasions, perhaps decided by the time of departure from London, there might also be overnight stops at Hillingdon or Uxbridge, made necessary less by distance than by loss of daylight because of the season of the year or the time of departure, especially from London when last minute business cropped up. Breakfast breaks and the need to feed, water and rest the horses appear more frequently than on the other journeys.

The biggest difference between his cross-country rides and those to London was the number of men who travelled with him. Amongst them, in addition to Robert Jones, were his country lawyer John Boulton of Tanworth, Warwickshire, one or two grooms, his hawk keeper and others prepared to act as servants to keep the London apartments running alongside the daily help.⁵ Five men were paid for the June-July stay in 1587 and a different five for thirty-eight days between October and December 1587.⁶ On his brief and hasty trip in June 1588 only Robert Jones and John Boulton accompanied him and similarly on the even shorter trip in September he rode with only William Man for company.⁷

In November 1586 the party which rode to London consisted of sixteen horses, possibly because money was being transported.⁸ Perhaps for the same reason a journey from London starting on 3 December 1587 saw passage arranged for ten animals between Fulham and Putney;⁹ nine of them must have been his own, brought up from the country and stabling paid for only a few days and a varying number of animals.¹⁰ On the same occasion John Boulton was paid to make a crossing between Hampton Court and Molesey, perhaps taking a brief message to the Standen household. In late April 1588, Ralph's party with nine horses rode to London via Mrs Pollard's. The groom, Augustine, was paid to lead them home starting next day.¹¹

⁴ CR 2632, ff. 169, 185 and others.

⁵ CR 2632, ff. 192, 199, 201.

⁶ CR 2632, ff. 84, 143.

⁷ CR 2632, f. 192-98; ff. 213-15.

⁸ CR 2632, f. 17.

⁹ CR 2632, ff. 143-44.

¹⁰ CR 2632, ff. 143-44.

¹¹ CR 2632, f. 169, 170.

The horses did not always make the whole journey to London, sometimes being left with Mrs Pollard or at Shiplake, even once at Staines and the journey completed by boat. At least once Sheldon's gelding, clearly his pride and joy, was ridden back to Weston by a groom, Augustine, and brought back again a few days before his return journey, presumably to reduce as far as possible the costs of stabling in London, costs rarely noted. Ralph travelled with a cloak bag, carrying only minimal luggage.¹² Shopping in London was packed into baskets of varying quality and size for onward transit by carrier to the nearest collecting point in the country. On two occasions a pillion was bought to carry extra items, one of them for the mule.¹³



Ralph Sheldon's London, drawn by William Smith around 1588 from his *Particuler Description*; The British Library, London, Sloane Ms 2695, f.52v and [wiki commons](#)

Ralph's neighbourhood

Arriving from the west, whether by water or by road, Ralph seems to have made a point of coming past Westminster, perhaps to stable his horses at one of the inns there.¹⁴ From there he and his entourage took the easiest means of conveyance, a boat downstream to his own apartments in the Whitefriars off Fleet Street. Leaving behind the stumpy gatehouse tower of Lambeth Palace and the ramshackle buildings of the Palace, its residential and administrative headquarters jumbled together, the view southwards stretched across the empty marshes of Lambeth towards the crowded housing in Southwark; on the north bank lay the long gardens of the grand houses facing onto the Strand. He was familiar with only a few; for a short time he visited Thomas, 4th Lord Paget's residence, later acquired by the earl of Leicester bordered on one side by Essex Street and he dined twice with an un-named host in the buildings of the former Savoy hospital, slowly turning into residential units.¹⁵

¹² CR 2632, ff. 52, 92.

¹³ CR 2632, f.83, f. 152 and by Robert Jones f. 207.

¹⁴ The reference to Tuttlles, f. 199, 26.6.1588, might be to today's Tothill Street in Westminster.

¹⁵ CR 2632, ff. 18, 195.

His river journey downstream ended almost on his own doorstep, at the water stairs of the former Whitefriars site shown on a woodcut map of London.¹⁶ It may have been a deal between William Sheldon and his distant maternal relative Archbishop Nicholas Heath in 1559 when the west and north dormitories were still standing which gave the Sheldon family accommodation there, possibly somewhat spartan.¹⁷ Ralph was still there in 1596.¹⁸ The exact position of his lodgings close to the river is pinpointed on a survey of 1612 made for the Clothworkers Company.¹⁹ They stood within the site formerly occupied by the White Friars, dissolved in November 1538. Though never amongst the richest orders in the capital, their precincts had fringed the river Thames and extended northwards to Fleet Street, lying between the Middle Temple and Water Lane,²⁰ Uncharacteristically laconic, John Stow, London's most detailed topographer writing around the 1590s, merely remarked that 'in the place of this Friars church be now many fair houses builded, lodgings for noble men and others'.²¹ They lay outside the jurisdiction of the City of London whose officials regarded the area as insalubrious, the haunt of pickpockets and prostitutes;²² they objected to and made difficulties for the foreign fencing master Isaac who ran a training school in the precincts.²³ Though Ralph might occasionally hear the shouting of prisoners and mad folk in nearby Bridewell, the close proximity of the house to the river must have alleviated some of the offensive smells from poor drainage and rotting garbage, keeping the air fresher than in the crowded City streets to the east. Ralph did, however, need to request a servant to clean an alley close to the house.²⁴ Attempts were made



The neighbourhood of Ralph's London house in the former Whitefriars off Fleet Street, from the map attributed to Ralph Agas, c.1561-70. © Hilary L. Turner

¹⁶ Prockter & Taylor, *The A-Z of Elizabethan London* reproduces the whole map.

¹⁷ *CPR 1547-48*, p.114; *CPR 1558-1560*, p. 79; TNA C 66/943, m. 28.

¹⁸ Letter from Charles Morrice addressed To my good friend William Manne be this delivered at Mr Sheldon's house within the Whyte Fryers, dated 11 May 1596, Bodleian Library Mss Tanner 115, f.139, also Charles Morrice describing his 'welcome in the country', letter to Sir John Hobart from Mr Sheldon's house at Whytefriars, 1596, BL Ms Harley 4713, f.48.

¹⁹ Schofield, *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell*, p. 129, from the Clothworkers Company Plan Book 1612, no 33. Its southern extent is approximately marked now by Carmelite House on the Victoria Embankment.

²⁰ Now Whitefriars Street and Carmelite Street.

²¹ Stow, *A Survey of London*, pp. 20-52.

²² Surrey History Centre, LM/793, nd pre 1576.

²³ *APC 11 1578-80*, p.183

²⁴ CR 2632, f. 29.

to keep a garden. The bank was scythed, ‘nayles’ bought to support the vine, seeds purchased and the court regularly weeded.²⁵

The purchase turned out to be far more significant than William could ever have anticipated.²⁶ His immediate neighbours, the six poor women living in an alms house built in 1539 by the Countess of Kent, might be of little importance. The other inhabitants were not. The most influential was the family of the Henrician diplomat, Sir Richard Morison, owner of part of the site, possibly known to William Sheldon through the former’s property transactions in Worcester;²⁷ his wife, Bridget, née Hussey, the sister of Mistress Anne Sheldon’s step-mother, resided in the Whitefriars as a widow at least until 1600, corresponding with the younger Cecil and on visiting terms with his wife.²⁸ Another established neighbour was Roger Alforde, on close terms with William Cecil.²⁹ His brother, Francis, the cheated purchaser of Aston sub Edge, the long drawn out legal case involving Sheldon in the early 1570s, lived nearby.³⁰ Regarded as a Catholic sympathizer, possibly even a supporter of Mary Queen of Scots, Roger had been a long-serving MP and lawyer. His wife Agnes was a known recusant. She later became a secret distributor of banned imported books, possibly the means by which Ralph acquired the five volumes of *A Memorial of a Christian Life*, the recently imported, widely circulated writings of the Spanish priest Luis de Granada.³¹ More transient residents included the de la Warr family; almost certainly therefore Ralph had had prior acquaintance with his second wife, Jane de la Warr.³² With them, perhaps only temporarily, lived Lady Babington of Kiddington, Oxfordshire³³ and, very briefly and perhaps sharing Ralph’s quarters, was the Markham family.

Another man with links to the Sheldon family occupied a house on the Fleet Street frontage of the site, the Catholic Sir Edward Saunders. Chief Justice of the Queen’s Bench under Queen Mary, Chief Baron of the Exchequer under Elizabeth, and cousin of Christopher Hatton, he was amongst the overseers of Sir Ambrose Cave’s will, uncle to both Saunders and Sheldon.³⁴ He was acquainted with two of Ralph’s brothers in law. John Goodwyn’s sister Joyce married Saunders’ brother Robert, Edmund Plowden acted as an executor of Saunders’ will (1576).³⁵ Eastwards towards the City lay more socially mixed occupied properties, one of them belonging to Roger Alforde’s brother, Francis and another to Roger Gifford, amongst the Queen’s physicians and one of the recognizance holders to whom Ralph

²⁵ CR 2632, f. 79, 133, 171.

²⁶ TNA C 66/943, m. 28; BLib Add Ms 40631 A ff. 28-20.

²⁷ Sowerby, *Renaissance and Reform in Tudor England: the careers of Sir Richard Morison c.1513-1556*, pp. 146-164.

²⁸ HMSSC, *Salisbury*, vol. 7, p. 470, 5 Nov.1597; vol. 8, p. 27, Jan. 29 1597-8; vol. 9, p. 76, Feb. 21 1598-9.

²⁹ Biography of Alford, Hasler, *House of Commons*; Barnett, *Place, profit and power*, pp. 24-7.

³⁰ Hasler, *House of Commons*.

³¹ Havens and Patton, ‘Underground Networks, prisons and the Circulation of Counter-reformation Books in Elizabethan England’, in Kelly, *Early Modern English Catholicism*, pp. 164-188, at 170-71, 178-79; Sheldon’s copy cost 17s, CR 2632, f. 174.

³² CPR 1555-1557, p. 258 11 Jan 1557.

³³ CSPD 1581-90, p. 275, no. 33(ii); TNA SP 12/183/f.90. Her son Philip married into the Goodwyn family, TNA C 2/Eliz/B15/21.

³⁴ TNA PROB 11/54/122.

³⁵ TNA PROB 11/58/517; ODNB.

became bound.³⁶ The French ambassador lived in nearby Salisbury House. They might all have congregated in the White Horse in Fleet Street; their households all drew water from the public conduit at the bottom of Shoe Lane.³⁷

Westwards lay the Inns of Court where Ralph's brother in law Edmund Plowden, staunch Catholic, much respected jurist, had chambers, wide acquaintance and a lengthy client list. Builder of the Middle Temple Hall, its opening celebrations attended by the Queen in 1576, he and his wife, Ralph's sister Katherine, were commemorated on his death by a tomb, much damaged, still to be seen in the Temple Church. Near the gate onto Fleet Street lived the clearly successful Emmanuel Maunsell, a scrivener employed by Sheldon, Thomas Tresham and the Catesby family.³⁸ Robert Atkinson, the Catholic Recorder of Oxford city for forty years and Sheldon's occasional lawyer, lived close by before his move to Chancery Lane.³⁹ Another brother in law, Sir John Goodwyn, had a house in the parish of St Edmund and St Clement, now in the shadow of the London School of Economics.⁴⁰

Moving north towards Holborn, then in Middlesex and thus also outside both the city's walls and its jurisdiction, stood the Throckmorton house with its gardens abutting on open fields, not far from Sir Christopher Hatton's large ex-episcopal brick residence.⁴¹ John Talbot, of Grafton, Worcestershire, lived in Clerkenwell;⁴² the Petres of Ingatestone, Essex, had a house on the west side of Aldersgate Street inside the walls.⁴³ Further east still, outside the walls beyond Bishopsgate the converted remains of St. Mary Spittle housed a group of men with estates in Suffolk, the county in which Ralph's youngest daughter would marry; it included Sir Thomas Cornwallis, the Hare brothers Michael and Robert, and John Hobart, a son of the Hobarts of Hales, Norfolk, sometime surveyor to the marquess of Winchester.⁴⁴

Purposes

Ralph's visits followed a similar pattern. After their arrival he, or his officers, attended almost immediately to the payment of rents to one particular institutional landlord, the Dean and Chapter of Westminster. With the money received before his departure he, or they, made their way to Westminster, usually by boat, to pay rents due from himself, for William Moulton of Todenham and occasionally for John Alderford to the Dean and Chapter's

³⁶ Lang, *Tudor Subsidies*, 1582, sections 315, 316, pp. 236-7.

³⁷ *CSPD 1591-94*, no. 105(4), p. 151.

³⁸ TNA PROB 11/71/233; Maunsell was a witness in several documents with links to the Sheldon circle; BAH MS 3061/1/156; SCLA ER3/2754 with which Childe also associated.

³⁹ Hasler, *House of Commons*.

⁴⁰ Lang, *Tudor Subsidies*, para 350, p.262

⁴¹ *APC 15 1587-88*, p. 348.

⁴² Lambeth Palace, London, Ms 2008, f.2.

⁴³ Edwards, *John Petre*, pp. 76-82; CR 2632, f.153.

⁴⁴ Probably the fourth of the eight sons of Sir James of Hales, cousin of the more eminent Henry appointed Attorney-General in July 1606 (*ODNB*) and himself variously described in the Tanner Mss as secretary and surveyor to the Marquis of Winchester (d. 1598).

representative, Mr Burden.⁴⁵ Ralph's holdings, acquired by his father, consisted of a lease of the manor of Atch Lench in the hinterland of Evesham and a portion of the tithes.⁴⁶

The next most important task was to arrange money matters, whether fresh loans for himself or repayment of existing commitments. The heaviest single obligation and longest running pre-occupation in Ralph's life was his relationship with the money-lender Thomas Horde. By 1586 Ralph had already entered into two recognizances, one for £3000, and the other for £2000; a further three, equally burdensome, were agreed within the account book's time frame, to be followed by a further three. These, however, were only part of the picture; many other loans are recorded, some to Sheldon, others, usually of small value and short term, made by Sheldon to a wide range of suppliants. For their recipients some of these clearly answered an unexpected shortfall; 'repayable in the country' with only low interest, the arrangements, clearly charitable, were generally honoured.

<https://www.ralphsheldon1537-1613.info/pdf-pages/Small-Loans-made-repaid.pdf>

The last days of his stay always saw an increase in shopping activity: much of it was for foodstuffs, some basic, including large quantities of fish, which had to be packed in baskets – of varying kinds, before being taken to a particular carrier working the most convenient route for conveyance to and collection in Warwickshire.⁴⁷ Other luxury items including spices, raisins, currants, anchovies, olives,⁴⁸ oranges and lemons were also regular purchases. Special commissions might be executed for friends; boots with silver buttons were bought for Sir John Lyttleton, wine for 'old Mrs Sheldon' and others; some was sent to Deddington for his own use.⁴⁹

Very considerable sums of money were spent on armour acquired from a craftsman in nearby Shoe Lane and the gun maker Dorrell. In November 1586 Ralph spent the large sum of £3 2s. for a caliver, a light, portable firearm, possibly with engraved decoration.⁵⁰ In February 1587 he ordered a suit of armour from a shop in Shoe Lane, making part payment in May and final payment in July, a total of £10.⁵¹ In November a London cutler was paid 13s 6d for a new velvet scabbard for his rapier and dagger, for another scabbard for his sword and for its cleaning.⁵² He dutifully met his obligation to provide a caliver for the parish of Tredington in July 1587 and spent a further £9 in November, 'for arms for the parsonage' there.⁵³ There were still more dealings, undefined, with Dorrell the same month.⁵⁴ In January 1588 Mrs Sheldon ordered a servant be rewarded for delivering two calivers which had cost

⁴⁵ Barnett, *Place, profit and power*, pp.43-4.

⁴⁶ William Sheldon's will TNA PROB 11/53/79.

⁴⁷ CR 2632, ff.18, 19, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 32, 34 37, 131, 138.

⁴⁸ Olives for Fulke Greville, CR 2632, f.69.

⁴⁹ CR 2632, f. 26, 138, 166, 174.

⁵⁰ CR 2632, f. 31, one of the less legible pages. Neil Younger suggested to me that this was a high price and the weapon might have been highly decorated, personal communication based on his article 'William Lambarde on the politics of enforcement in Elizabethan England', pp. 74-76.

⁵¹ CR 2632, f.45, 15 Feb, f. 64, 21 May '87; 9 July, f.83. It was then wrapped in cotton and packed into a basket.

⁵² CR 2632, f.130, 11 Nov '87.

⁵³ CR 2632, f.90 July 1587, f. 140 28 Nov '87.

⁵⁴ CR 2632, f. 141.

20s.⁵⁵ In August Ralph purchased a petronell, a large pistol, for £1 18s 9d as well as six morions (brimmed helmets), a piece of body armour (a corslet) and three lance staves for the light horsemen he was obliged to furnish for the troops mustered for the defence against the Armada.⁵⁶

Expenditure on clothes was significant (£78 19s 11d), Ralph fascinated by hats, needing cloaks, wanting hose and doublet; Mrs Anne accessorized.⁵⁷ Material for dark blue livery for the household servants was bought; Daniel the hawk-keeper wore it when in London, an unusual interest for Ralph to pursue there, perhaps because of a family connection to the Queen's master of hawks, Michael Throckmorton.⁵⁸

Ralph was also able to indulge his intellectual pursuits; the purchase of a copy of Robert Tanner's *Mirroure for Mathematiques* from the book stalls in St Paul's Churchyard and a map, not identified, costing 40s.⁵⁹ He engaged a music copyist, Nicholas Carleton, to copy 'the madrigals of Orlando' – those of the Flemish composer Orlando Lassos.⁶⁰ Lute strings and virginals were frequent purchases.⁶¹ Bookish interests were shared with a wide circle including Sir Thomas Cornwallis and members of the Hare family.⁶² His step-mother's steward was William Walter, collaborator with Dean Goodman to whom she made a bequest, both benefactors of Westminster School; acquaintance with the latter, a former Cecil chaplain and rector of Waddesdon, might have been fostered, in an unorthodox way, through two months spent in 1580-81 in house arrest in Westminster Deanery. He or Mr Burden to whom Ralph paid his Westminster rents, and another legatee of his step-mother, might have made Ralph known, however, distantly, to William Camden (1551–1623, the school's headmaster and historian of England from whose *Britannia*, first published in 1586, passages were paraphrased in panels on the tapestry maps. William Walter's son Robert became a friend who made both Ralph and his son his executors; later Ralph would erect a tomb for him. Richard Hakluyt the elder witnessed the will of Henry Russell of Great Malvern with whom Sheldon had business contact; his cousin, Hakluyt the younger, the author of a compendium of voyages, might have opened up wider opportunities.⁶³ Though it must be considered speculation and the connections lie hidden, there were people through whom Ralph could have heard firsthand about the Flemish cartographer Abraham Ortelius from whose newly produced work, the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, the map of the continent of Africa was borrowed for use in the tapestry map of Oxfordshire.⁶⁴ He would almost certainly have known of those Englishmen who supplied drawings of English towns to the German

⁵⁵ CR 2632, f.151.

⁵⁶ CR 2632, f. 207, 31 July 1588.

⁵⁷ <https://www.ralphsheldon1537-1613.info/pdf-pages/Clothing-bought-in-London.pdf>

⁵⁸ *CSPD 1547-80*, p. 367, George; Michael *CSPD 1595-97*, p.397, no.141(2); both Docquet Book references.

⁵⁹ CR 2632, ff. 84, 177.

⁶⁰ CR 2632, f. 185.

⁶¹ CR 2632, ff. 18, 19, 80, 190, 193, 196.

⁶² Scott-Warren, *The Book as Gift*, pp. 90-97.

⁶³ Hakluyt, *The principal navigation*; TNA PROB 11/73/140.

⁶⁴ The *Theatrum* was published in 1570 in Antwerp. The map purchased, CR 2632, f. 177, is unidentified.

mapmakers Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg for use in their lavish production picturing the cities of the world, the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, its first volume published in 1572.

Over the years other, much larger, items must also have come from London. Already an essential part of his life as it was increasingly for many others, it was in the capital Ralph would find the craftsmen with the talents he needed to decorate the new house at Weston. Though the carpentry and glazing could be entrusted to local artisans, almost certainly Flemish immigrants were needed to paint the panels in the portrait frieze which topped the panelling of the Great Dining Room. In all likelihood it was a Flemish tapestry designer who created the cartoon and Flemish weavers who wove the tapestry maps, possibly known to and recruited by Richard Hyckes, employed in the Queen's household to look after her vast collection of tapestries. Certainly the tombs Ralph later planned for his forebears, his parents and himself were executed by men in Southwark workshops not those at Burton on Trent.⁶⁵ His own portrait has been attributed to the Flemish immigrant painter Hieronymos Custodis, briefly on London between 1589 and 1593 who also executed commissions for the Chandos family.⁶⁶

Ralph's business might fill his day, but evenings were for socializing. Several meals were eaten at Fishers at nearby Temple Bar which sound like convivial evenings enlivened by cards and singing; others were taken at an un-located tavern, The Rose, in The King's Head, New Fish Street and in Newgate market.⁶⁷ He did not always eat out, sending for meals from local hostleries remarkably like take-aways, supplemented by pies, puddings and cheeses sent from his country properties.⁶⁸ Money was given him for his 'Friday drinking'.⁶⁹ Competitive games of cards and 'mawe' were frequent; money was regularly given him either to play or to pay gambling debts betraying visits to friends never named. Occasionally, or perhaps when necessary, he made duty calls men of high rank, some of whom are more likely to have been his father's contacts than his own.

Law business

Most of his time, however, was spent dealing with legal matters and the cases then currently going through the law courts. Except for the Court of Common Pleas, Ralph had a law suit in all the Westminster courts in the years 1586-88 alone. None was concerned with offended sensibilities; most concerned matters of property, whether ownership or acquisition or, in the case of his tenants, of neglect or disregard of the tenancy terms.

<https://www.ralphsheldon1537-1613.info/pdf-pages/Sheldon-at-Law.pdf>

⁶⁵ Richardson, 'The Effigy Tombs of the Worcestershire Gentry 1500-1700', pp. 149-173.

⁶⁶ Strong, 'Elizabethan Painting: An approach through Inscriptions - II: Hieronimo Custodis', pp.103-108.

⁶⁷ CR 2632, ff. 20, 82, 124, 128, 132, 137, 143,176. He was also acquainted with the Three Crowns, (f.40), the Saracen's Head in Carter Lane, (f.59) and the Crown in Fleet Street, (f.59).

⁶⁸ Pies (pyes) to London, CR 2632, ff.128, 166; pease pudding from Weston; cheese from Beoley and Weston, CR 2632, ff. 22, 129, 133, 152, 164.

⁶⁹ A custom maintained even by Sir Francis Walsingham who invited the earls of Leicester and Warwick for 'a Friday night's drinking after the ancient and catholic order' on their return from a journey to Wilton in Wiltshire in November 1578 (Cottrell Dormer MS, MSS letters, 1570-1630, art. 25); *ODNB*.

Some of those cases can be followed in detail; two, concerning Tredington and Wolford, were pursued in Star Chamber;⁷⁰ three were under way in Chancery, concerning Deddington, Wadborough and Brailes;⁷¹ a fourth, arising from his own desire to increase his holdings in the Knee Brook valley by a case against William Tomlyns had more or less concluded.⁷² There were several other Chancery cases, barely more than hints, in particular a suit on behalf of his brother William against one Lane concerning Saintbury, Gloucestershire.⁷³ An Exchequer Court case signposts allegations that Ralph had infringed royal rights in woodlands at Salford Priors.⁷⁴ He oversaw a case in King's Bench as the



Westminster, the centre of government, from the Agas map, © Hilary L Turner

executor of his deceased neighbour at Honington, Anthony Gybbes, in July 1587 and another in Chancery.⁷⁵ Finally, he had a suit in the Court of Wards to secure wardship of the son of a Warwick man who owned land in the Knee Brook valley which Ralph wished to acquire.⁷⁶ Surprisingly, he paid bail for his neighbour and former opponent, Anthony Ingram of Wolford after their long running case had ended.⁷⁷ A dispute concerning Barcheston, its rector and the tithes, was under way in the Archbishop's Court of Audience at Lambeth.⁷⁸ When an impasse was reached, Hyckes continued proceedings in the Court of Requests, the so-called 'poor man's court'.⁷⁹ There are hints that still other cases were outstanding, prosecuted in the Assize courts in Worcester-, Warwick- and Oxfordshire.⁸⁰

⁷⁰ Tredington TNA STAC 5/H31/35; STAC 7/12/39, STAC 5/H64/22, STAC 5/H19/13; Wolford STAC 5/S8/4 STAC 7/15/22 and STAC 5/S83/10.

⁷¹ TNA Deddington C 2/Eliz/A8/55, CR 2632, f. 56; C 2/Eliz/L5/37; Greville C 2/Eliz/G3/67.

⁷² Tomlyns, TNA C 2/Eliz/T10/1; a later case re Whichford C 78/110/11, 9 May 1601 available on AALT..

⁷³ WaCRO CR 2632, ff. 80, 172; Gloucestershire Archives, D4431/2/26/4/1. Thomas Bartlett's will, TNA PROB 11/65/22, substantiates John Lane's existence. The case must have succeeded; the land remained with family until 1722/23, SCLA DR 648/1, Seyntbury (now Saintbury).

⁷⁴ TNA E 133/2/314 where intrusion was alleged.

⁷⁵ TNA C 2/Eliz/G14/63, June 17th 1587, CR 2632, f. 83; AALT KB 29/223, [AALT Page \(uh.edu\)](http://www.aalt.org.uk/ukgwa/+/http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php?title=REQ_2/121/32)

⁷⁶ CR 2632, ff. 45, 63, 67.

⁷⁷ CR 2632, f. 82.

⁷⁸ CR 2632 f. 142.

⁷⁹ Hyckes, probably on Ralph's behalf, pursued the case, TNA REQ 2/ 223/66, REQ 2/121/32, transcribed at https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/+/http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php?title=REQ_2/121/32

and

https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/+/http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php?title=REQ_2/223/66

Surviving sheets from some of these cases allow us to follow the proceedings, the arguments sometimes expressed in dramatic and exaggerated fashion, introduced for effect and in the hope of winning sympathy. Where Ralph's replies survive, his voice rings out across the centuries, passionate, ingenuous in his own defence and not always accurate or disinterestedly presenting events as they had really happened, for example in the cases about Tredington and Whichford. Though possibly no more than any other litigant, some of the cases suggest that Ralph was perfectly comfortable practising economies with the truth in order to achieve his own ends.

Gossip about some of the cases must have come to the ears of the great and the good, in particular about those conducted in the court of Star Chamber, heard by privy councillors assisted by members of the judiciary. That pursued in the court of Wards might have attracted the attention of its Master, William Cecil, in passing if not in person. Ralph's calls on men far above his station seeking their assistance would be neither out of character nor out of reach. Thus possibly his supper with Sir Walter Mildmay was connected to complications with tenants on Crown lands in Brailes following from decisions for which Mildmay and Cecil had been responsible in 1583, now creating the difficulties which Sheldon faced. The help of Sir Christopher Hatton, recently appointed Lord Chancellor, seems to have been requested for a matter concerning Ralph's cousin William Sheldon of Abberton and possibly also for support in other matters concerning Brailes. Much later Ralph attempted to interfere at the highest level in the case of another Brailes tenant, one of the many in the parish made unhappy by Ralph's measures designed to exploit his lands, and his authority, to the full, who mounted a long campaign against him.⁸¹

Over the decades Ralph became involved in at least thirty-four cases, fourteen prosecuted on his own behalf.⁸² <https://www.ralphsheldon1537-1613.info/pdf-pages/Fees-to-Lawyers.pdf>. Such extensive litigation demanded the employment of large numbers of underlings – and cost money. They also required an impressive number of lawyers; at least twelve men are named in the accounts because they required to be paid, sometimes in gold.⁸³ The greatest single number was the team dealing with the cases about Tredington and Barcheston. The relatively young Worcestershire born William Coventre, who would go on to a distinguished career, was kept busy in three cases simultaneously; he signed every sheet in the proceedings connected with Tredington, most of those against Greenfield and several of those concerning Barcheston.⁸⁴ Sergeant Puckering, whose counsel was also sought over Tredington questions, had recently purchased Warwick Priory and might thus have an interest in county matters. Robert Atkinson was an occasional adviser, first on Tredington and again in 1604 when his services were requested in negotiations with Horde.⁸⁵ Some are named as pleading in specific courts and perhaps possessed particular expertise, for example Thomas

⁸⁰ CR 2632, f. 208.

⁸¹ Letter to Julius Caesar, Master of the Court of Requests, BLib, Ms Lansdowne 161, f. 90(92).

⁸² A total exceeded by Sir William Darrell of Littlecote, see Hall, *Society in the Elizabethan Age*, Appendix 2.

⁸³ CR 2632, f.41.

⁸⁴ He first appears in TNA C 2/Eliz/G3/46; STAC 5/H31/35; REQ 2/121/32.

⁸⁵ My evidence for his only occasional appearances contradicts Davidson, 'Robert Atkinson, A famous lawyer', pp. 91-97.

Jackson at the Warwickshire courts and John Wem in King's Bench.⁸⁶ Finally, Mr Cooke, also Coke, may well identify as Sir Edward, later to become Attorney-General (1594) and in that capacity to become involved in Sheldon's affairs again in 1594 and 1606. The account book shows his determined action in pursuit of his client's interests when Coke/Cooke took a boat down river to the Court at Greenwich in a last ditch attempt to secure favourable judgement in the Barcheston case.⁸⁷ They formed a competent team; several were men whose names became familiar in the legal world. Ralph met them at Westminster, twice certainly and twice probably in the King's Head.⁸⁸

Two names occur again and again - John Boulton and William Childe. The more humble, John Boulton, from Tanworth in Warwickshire, is frequently found in charge of executing the administrative side of legal business, for example arranging for writs to be issued, documents copied, recognizances arranged and payments made to the Exchequer or for legal documents to further prosecution. Even though he owned a moderate size house and some land, he also acted as an occasional household servant in London for humdrum daily tasks, for example buying firewood or transporting shopping to the carriers. He and his wife were listed as recusants in the 1592 survey,⁸⁹ but survived to receive a bequest in Sheldon's will. John died in 1615. A later generation married into the Sheldon family.⁹⁰

The Childe family

A long association between the Sheldon and the Childe families began around 1519 when William Childe first leased salt vats in Droitwich to Ralph Sheldon (d. 1546). Ten years later Sheldon bought the vats, the first of the many the family would acquire through the century. There is no trace of continuing contact until the next generation of the families met. William Sheldon, Ralph's eldest son, served with Childe's son, also William, on a commission in Worcestershire in 1563 when Childe was already feodary, the Crown's officer.⁹¹ In 1570 when William Sheldon wrote his will he appointed Childe as one of his wife's trustees for land at Studley. As feodary, Childe was one of those who conducted Sheldon's inquisition post mortem in Worcester in March 1571, as he did on Ralph's brother William in 1588; his son performed the same office for Ralph Sheldon in 1613.⁹²

Between 1571 and his own death in 1601 Childe was a constant advisor, involved in almost all Sheldon's deals. There was very little that he did not know about Sheldon family

⁸⁶ Thomas Jackson, CR 2632, ff. 63, 65, 67, 206, 207, had also acted for Ralph in making a recovery of Weston and Compton Scorpion around 1575 in Chancery, WARD 7/51/91, and was still employed in 1597, CR 580/25; John Wem attorney in King's Bench, CR 2632, ff. 71, 83, 155.

⁸⁷ CR 2632, f. 88.

⁸⁸ CR 2632, ff. 65, 67, 132, 175.

⁸⁹ TNA SP 12/243, no.76, ff.235-248, transcribed Hodgetts in *Worcestershire Recusant*, vol 5, May 1965, pp.18-30, continued in vol.6, December 1968, pp.7-20.

⁹⁰ Bodl MS Wood F.33, f. 146; SCLA DR41/20, f. 105 where a John Boulton is said to have married Mary, daughter of Baldwin Sheldon, grandson of Baldwin d. 1549. Possibly neither is correct.

⁹¹ *CPR 1560-63*, p. 547.

⁹² TNA WARD 7/13/135; *CPR 1587-88*, L&I vol 297, no. 180, original no longer extant; WARD 7/51/91.

affairs, for example the return of the Salford properties and the transfer of Shrawley manor as trustee for Sheldon's cousin Anne née Gower;⁹³ following the transfer of the lands to her on her second marriage he had also acted on her behalf in subsequent arrangements between her husband, his first family and his second.⁹⁴ He had been involved in a property deal with John Harries of Chipping Campden around 1584,⁹⁵ was named in the recognizances with Thomas Horde and cited as complicit in proceedings against Greenfield.⁹⁶ On at least one occasion he certainly attended the manor court at Brailes, though this was probably a frequent occurrence.⁹⁷ He played a prominent role, not all of it honourable, in the transactions with Robert Hyll, Sheldon's nomination as rector of both Tredington and Barcheston. He was accused of composing a letter which gave Richard Hyckes a share of tithes rightfully Hyll's at Barcheston.⁹⁸ In 1596 he fought for the jointure rights of Ralph's oldest daughter Elizabeth against the family of her estranged, now deceased husband.⁹⁹

Childe was probably slightly older than Ralph. His long service as feodary of Worcestershire and his close relationship with the Sheldons attracted opprobrium. When in 1586 he was pricked as sheriff a complaint was made to Sir Francis Walsingham describing him as being too close to the Sheldon family disliked for its influence across the county – something of an exaggeration; 'Childe is a man rayseed from poor and meane estate by Mr Sheldon's father and has good gotten not without trying and very hard opinion in the country'.¹⁰⁰

He and his family owned at least two properties in the county, one, Pensax, on the west, the other, Northwick, above the Knee Brook valley in Blockley parish. A younger brother, John, lived at Enstone in Oxfordshire. When William died, in 1601, another property, Pull Court in Bushley near Tewkesbury, was left to Ralph Sheldon 'in settlement of debts'.¹⁰¹ His son, another William, took his place. He was admitted to the Middle Temple in November 1575 as William Childe of Northwick the younger.¹⁰² He served as sheriff in Worcestershire from 1599-1600.

But, just as many of the cases Ralph chose to fight pushed the bounds he had a wide acquaintance within the less eminent legal world of ushers and clerks. Not all were honest men. In 1591 a complaint was lodged against John Wem, who had acted as Ralph's attorney and subsequently became under-sheriff of Worcestershire.¹⁰³ Edward Coke as Attorney-

⁹³ Sale of Shrawley, *CPR 1578-1580*, no. 1432; trustee for Salford Woods, *CPR 1578-80*, no. 1741.

⁹⁴ TNA C 78/91/7, mm. 25-27, available on AALT.

⁹⁵ Gloucestershire Archives, D4431/2/26/4/1.

⁹⁶ Recited in E 126/1, 28 Jan 1608, f.95; Greenfield TNA C 2/Eliz/G3/46.

⁹⁷ TNA E 133/8/1317.

⁹⁸ See Chapter Ten.

⁹⁹ TNA C 3/263/26.

¹⁰⁰ *CSPD 1581-1590*, p. 369, no.35, TNA SP 12/195 f.58.

¹⁰¹ TNA C 142/268/143.

¹⁰² Cooke, *Inner Temple Members*, p. 19.

¹⁰³ TNA KB 27/1302, on AALT at

http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT7/Eliz/KB27no1302/bKB27no1302Pt1fronts/IMG_0047.htm

and

http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT7/Eliz/KB27no1302/bKB27no1302Pt1fronts/IMG_0048.htm

General prosecuted Christopher Thacker, Gentleman of Clements Inn, Middlesex, on a charge of making a false entry in an official document.¹⁰⁴ His contact with Sheldon was minimal but, clerk to Hugh Browker, a prothonotary of the Court of Common Pleas, Thacker's bequests suggest a successful legal career.¹⁰⁵

The cases Ralph pursued shed as much light on his preoccupations as on his attitudes, conduct and behaviour, in particular his relations with and attitude to the established Church; to the ownership of lands or its undeserved loss; to the behaviour of his tenants and, obliquely, on the background to Ralph's farming practices.

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TNA SP 46/38/fo148, 16 November 1591; Petition to Burleigh by Edmund Langston for the hearing of the cause against John Wem, late undersheriff of Worcestershire; Langston is in prison in Worcester castle.

¹⁰⁴ TNA STAC 7/10/17, 20 May 1602.

¹⁰⁵ CR 2632, ff. 71, 89, 142; TNA PROB 11/124/185, 1614; his executors were men with connections in Staffordshire, Northamptonshire and Worcestershire.