

Weston Pallace, the Sheldon family's house at Weston in Long Compton, Warwickshire : an attempted reconstruction

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The thirty-eight hearths chargeable in the 1670s Hearth Tax assessment made Weston then the sixth largest residence in Warwickshire. Built between 1586 and 1590 it was demolished in 1827 and nothing now remains on the site. Albeit speculative, this attempt to reconstruct its plan and internal layout has been made using eighteenth century drawings, a handful of visitors' comments, a detailed auction catalogue of 1781 and a single dimension.

The eighteenth-century antiquary John Nichols described the site of the house built above the long-deserted village of Weston in Long Compton, Warwickshire, as being situated on a fine knoll, from which the lawn gradually descends and is bounded by clumps and a grove of very large trees; the extensive prospects, the inequality of the ground, and the luxuriance of the trees, make the whole extremely picturesque and beautiful.¹

Nothing now remains of the building, its site marked on Ordnance Survey maps as Weston Gardens; Nichols would find its location still recognizable.

By the 1670s local residents knew the Sheldons' house as 'Weston Pallace'. When it was built, some hundred years earlier, its fifty-two rooms made it the fourth largest in the county.² By the end of the eighteenth century it was in need of substantial repair which the family was not in a financial position to carry out. Finally sold, in 1827, the new owner decided on demolition and replacement, though not without debating the possibility of preserving the older building.

Documentary and pictorial sources make it possible to attempt a reconstruction. Sketchy building accounts for the period Michaelmas 1586-88 afford only a few clues to detail, but a number of eighteenth-century drawings, some nineteenth-century architectural sketches and a detailed auction catalogue of 1781 suggest its plan and internal layout. A handful of chance references throw a little more light on the property's history, in particular of one room, hinting at the Elizabethan layout from which some Elizabethan furnishings survive. However, these sources also raise problems, not all of which can be solved; the account which follows contains considerable speculation.

¹ John Nichols, *Antiquarian Repertory*, i, London 1775, p. 220.

² Only Charlecote (42), Combe Abbey (52) and probably Stoneleigh (70 by 1626) had more chimneys. G.Tyack, 'Country-house building in Warwickshire 1500-1914', University of Oxford MLitt thesis, 1970, p. 15.

History

The manor and lands at Weston, site of a settlement in Long Compton deserted because of enclosure by a previous owner, were acquired in 1533 by William Sheldon of Beoley (d.1570).³ The first of that Sheldon's many property purchases, it gave him the property qualification to hold office in the county.⁴ In 1545 he received royal licence to empark 300 acres, the fields of the former hamlet; they were to be known for ever as Weston Park.⁵ In 1656 William Dugdale, the county's first historian, wrote that William 'liking well the situation...built a very fair house here.'⁶ Others credit his son, Ralph (d.1613); Anthony Wood (1632-95) said it was built in 1588. Securely dated documents and artefacts confirm Wood's information – though not his very specific date.⁷ Both statements could be correct; they are certainly not incompatible. Several of William's children were baptised in Long Compton and later, after the effectual shift from residence at Beoley some of Ralph's daughters were married there.⁸ In 1555 William was said to be riding from Weston to the family property at Beoley when he witnessed a fight at Barcheston;⁹ the house was burgled in 1563¹⁰ and Sir Henry Sydney visited in October 1573.¹¹ In 1581 Ralph addressed two letters to Thomas 4th Lord Paget from Weston and to others in 1587 and 1588.¹² Something habitable existed.

In the 1580s Ralph was certainly engaged in building operations. Later drawings show the result to have been a square-plan house enclosing a central courtyard, (see Figure 1). As William Harrison phrased it, 'each one desireth to set his

³ The site was purchased for £573 6.8d. from George Kebull, grandson of the Coventry-born London merchant, Henry Kebull, Warwickshire County Record Office (WCRO), CR 456 box 22,23; *The Victoria County History of the county of Warwick (VCH)*, v, ed. L. F. Salzman, London 1949, p.55.

⁴ For a biography of William see; Biography and Epitaph of William Sheldon c.1500-1570, [<http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP33BIOGWmS.pdf>, accessed 27 October 2023].

⁵ *Letters & Papers Foreign and Domestic of Henry VIII*, 1545, ii, p. 846 (34).

⁶ William Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*, 1st edition 1656, London, p. 446a.

⁷ Dugdale's original statement was corrected in the revised edition of 1730 by Dr Thomas; Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*, i, p.584n. Ralph's epitaph in Beoley church, its date suspect, says Ralph was the builder, probably on the authority of Anthony Wood: Bodleian Library, (Bod Lib), MS Rawlinson D 807, fo.15.

⁸ Bod Lib., MS Wood F.33, fos 139, 144-48.

⁹ See Sixteenth-Century Barcheston [www.barchestonhistory.info, accessed 27 October 2023]; The National Archives (TNA), STAC 4/6/7.

¹⁰ *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1563-66*, p. 304, no. 1681; TNA, C 66/1016, m. 24 (top).

¹¹ Letter to Burghley from Weston, *Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, Tudor Period*, iii, 1571-1575, p. 417; original at TNA, SP 63/42 fo 86, no.82.

¹² Staffordshire Record Office, D603/K/1/7/21, 15; British Library (BL), Add Ms 36901, fos 6, 13, 28.

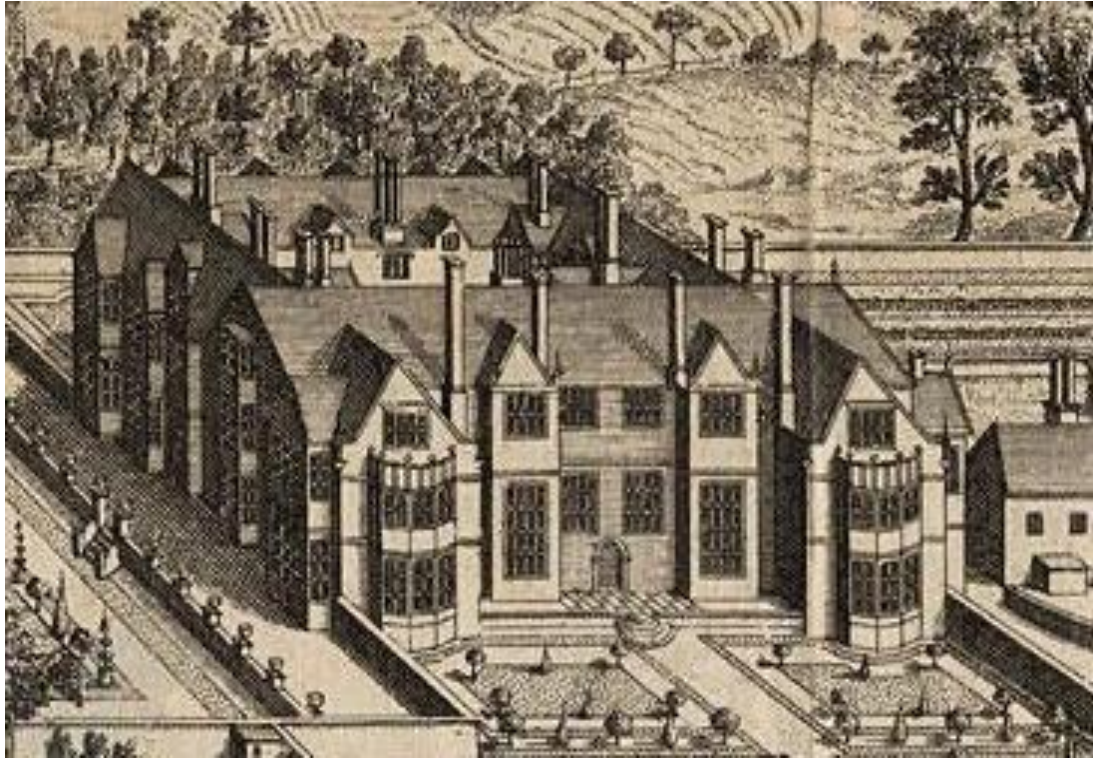


Figure 1 : Weston House, enlarged from The Prospect of Weston from the south-east, Henry Beighton, 1716, © Hilary L Turner

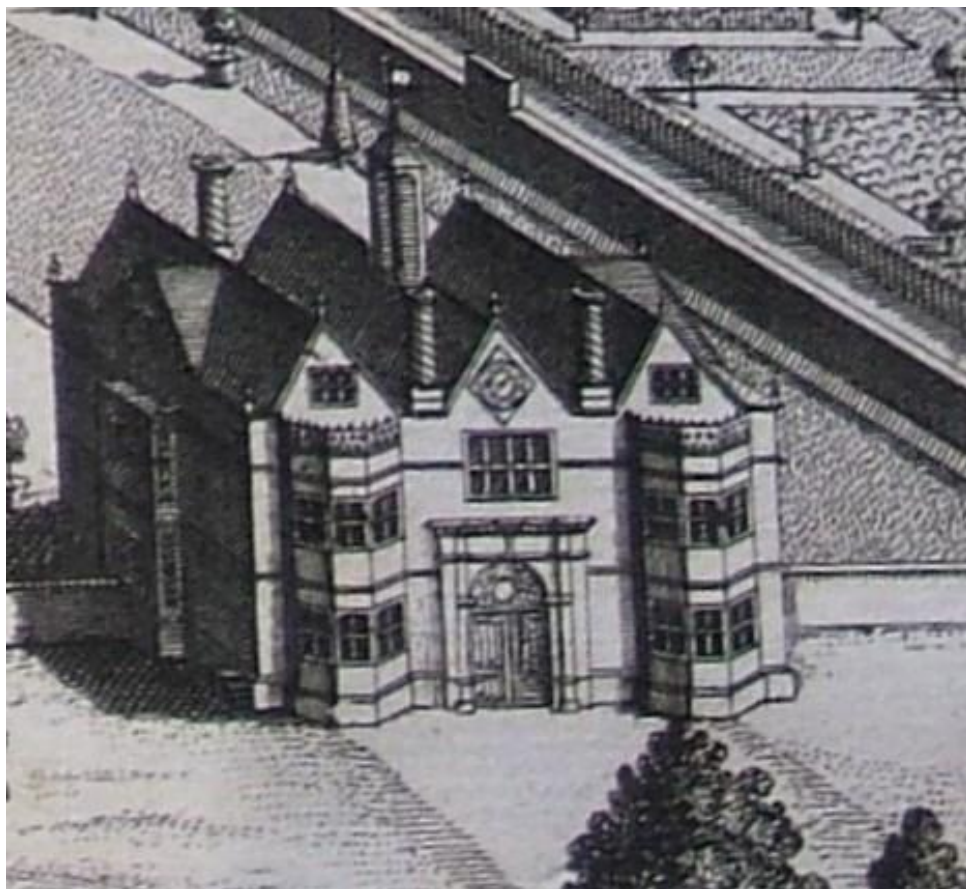


Figure 2 : The Gatehouse, enlarged from Beighton's Prospect, 1716, © Hilary L Turner

house aloft on the hill to be seen afar off'.¹³ Sheldon followed fashion, building on the hilltop above the deserted village.¹⁴ The principal rooms turned their back on the old settlement, facing into the park across which the house was approached through a detached gatehouse (see Figure 2). Entries in Ralph's personal account book covering the period Michaelmas 1586 to Michaelmas 1588 show that early in 1587 work was well under way but provide only limited information about its extent. By the end of September 1588, the shell may have been complete, its interior yet to be fitted out. Except for equipment for a hot house¹⁵ further details are lacking, but that the finished house was deficient in the most up to date sanitary arrangements – a flushing lavatory invented by himself – was remarked on by Sir John Harington of Kelston, the Queen's cousin, in 1596.¹⁶ Internal decoration may still have required attention even at the start of the new century. Thomas Robyns, the steward there, left £12 for distribution to 'very poor workmen about the house at Weston' in 1605.¹⁷

Two seventeenth-century sources provide some indication of its size, appearance and its visual impact. In the Hearth Tax records of the 1670s the house was assessed for payment on 38 hearths, with the designation Weston Pallace.¹⁸ Asked to organize his patron's funeral the garrulous Anthony Wood 'caused the hall at Weston, the staircase, dining roome and roome of state, to be hung with scocheons', thus defining the three essential Elizabethan grand spaces.¹⁹

By then, however, the property had long been under-used; Ralph's son was abroad between 1625 and 1633. The house was pillaged and may have suffered minor damage during the Civil War (1642-47) because the Sheldons were Royalist supporters. Their estates and houses were subsequently forfeit, redeemed in 1660.²⁰ Its then owner, Ralph 'the Great' Sheldon (1623-84) the builder's great grandson, made some cosmetic changes, including, in 1677, the insertion of armorial glass commemorating family marriages over several generations,²¹ now removed to the

¹³ Quoted from Mark Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House*, Yale 1966, p.20

¹⁴ C. Dyer, 'Deserted Medieval Villages in the West Midlands', *Economic History Review*, xxxv (1982), pp. 19-23, 26; *Domesday of Inclosures*, ed. I.S. Leadam, Royal Historical Society, (London 1898), pp. 415-16, 648, 652.

¹⁵ £3 2s. was paid 'for the copper vessel for the hothouse'; its transport, together with a pot, to Weston cost 38s 7d, WCRO, CR 22632, fos. 214, 215, 218, September 1588.

¹⁶ John Harington, 'An Apology for Ajax, 1596', ed. E. S. Donno, *Sir John Harington's A New Discourse on a stale subject, called the Metamorphosis of Ajax: a critical annotated edition*, London 1962, p. 240.

¹⁷ TNA, PROB 11/106/186; he had been in Sheldon's employment since at least 1586, WCRO, CR 2632, fos 34,139, 146, 211, 212.

¹⁸ *The Warwickshire Hearth Tax*, ed. Tom Arkell and Nathaniel Alcock, Dugdale Society, xliii, 2010, p. 200.

¹⁹ *The Life & Times of Anthony Wood*, ed. A. Clarke, Oxford Historical Society (OHS), xvi (1894), iii, pp. 97-98, 6 July 1684. Reference to Mr Payne boarding the 'great chamber' in November 1586 is probably to work in London since he was a London woodmonger: WCRO, CR 2632, fo. 24.

²⁰ William Sheldon's (1589-1656) account of his damaged properties was first printed by N. F. Woodward, *The Story of Lower Skiltes*, Evesham 1879, pp. 13-14 and reprinted by E.A.B. Barnard, *The Sheldons*, Cambridge 1936, pp. 49-50. Further documents at TNA, SP 23/1116, no. 1011-1016, *Calendar of the proceedings of the Committee for Compounding*, part III, 1647-50, ed. M A E Green, London 1891, pp. 1953-55; TNA, C 6/156/146; C 6/156/191.

²¹ SCLA (Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive), Stratford, Bloom Collection, DR 41/108 is a drawing of all of them.

Manor House in Long Compton. Some of it, in particular the arms of Sheldon and Markham, he had taken from the family's house at Steeple Barton when it was undergoing extensive adaptations.²² Other small alterations, the sort made to every old house, are known. Anthony Wood (1632-95), a frequent visitor to Ralph 'the Great', grumbled that his patron could afford to spend £200 or £300 pounds altering his house but not to pay for the publication of Wood's book.²³ He does not say whether this accounted only for Ralph's expenditure on shelving his books, in a 'large square wainscot room over the kitchen' and his coins, medals and 'rarities' in 'a little room over the entry into the hall', later moving them to an upper room 'new wainscotted' close to the north end of the Long Gallery.²⁴ Though his successor 'translated' the books there too, by 1781 these rooms had changed functions and the books had gone elsewhere. After Ralph's death Weston and its estate descended to his nephew, another Ralph formerly resident at Steeple Barton.²⁵ Just under one hundred years later, in 1781, most of the contents, but not the house, were sold.²⁶

For the next forty-five years the property was let. A draft lease of 1790 to the earl of Powis listed

the capital message ... of Weston Hall together with the offices stables coach house old malt kiln greenhouse pleasure grounds and lawn containing together about 26 acres in which the house stands...together with the several fixtures household stuff implements and utensils of household and other household goods and furniture...and also all the fishponds.

It also noted that

the said Ralph Sheldon shall put into proper repair the roof of the house offices stables coach house and old malt kiln and open up such of the windows (now stopped up) as the said earl of Powis shall desire...²⁷

Finally, in 1827, a sale was agreed. After considerable debate with rival architects, Thomas Harrison and Edward Blore, the new owner, the Lancashire cotton magnate Sir George Philips, decided, to demolish the property. The engineer, James Trubshaw, described his astonishment that the house was still standing for 'the walls were literally a heap of rubbish'.²⁸ Some of that rubbish, including the best stone, was disposed of down the well which the new owner had intended to re-use.²⁹ Other things

²² Bod Lib, Ms Wood E.1, fo.110.

²³ A. Wood, *The Life and Times of Anthony a Wood*, iii (1682-95), p. 34.

²⁴ Wood, *The Life and Times of Anthony a Wood*, iii, p. 103.

²⁵ Birmingham Archives and Heritage (BA&H), MS 3061/1/238, 10 October 1683.

²⁶ Christie and Ansell, *Sale Catalogue August 28-September 11, 1781*, William Sheldon of Weston, Warwickshire, (henceforth Sale Cat 1781), now online in Cengage/Gale Eighteenth century Collections on-line part two, search under Christie and Ansell 1781. A copy is in Cambridge University Library.

²⁷ SCLA, ER3/4996, 12 June 1790; terms repeated in later leases, WCRO, CR 456, box 17, uncatalogued. I am grateful to Henry Warriner for this reference.

²⁸ WCRO, CR 1381, part 3 60-62 of a typed transcript of Philips' Memoirs, written sometime after the events. Quoted by Michael Warriner, *A Prospect of Weston*, Kineton 1978, pp. 28-29.

²⁹ Philips Memoirs, WCRO, CR 1381, p.92.

too ‘which should have been retained’ were destroyed. The new house covered a larger area than its predecessor; in turn it was demolished in 1933.³⁰

Elizabethan Evidence

Three material survivals contemporary with the house can still be studied, part of the building accounts, parts of the tapestry maps and examples from a frieze of portrait heads.³¹

Accounts surviving for the period Michaelmas 1586 to Michaelmas 1588 suggest that much of the structural work was complete.³² There are few references to purchase of materials; entries are largely payment for unskilled labour.³³ In the twelve months 1586-1587 £300+ was spent on ‘workemen’, almost double what was spent the following year (£121+) when payments were made to three separate freemasons, Lytell (£46), Ansell (£8) and Offley (£1.13.0), all from Burford and to a free mason from Chipping Norton (£1), perhaps for specific tasks. Joiners from Birmingham received £8 13s 4d, Mr Hall the ‘plomer’ £5 6s 4d.³⁴ Clearly the supervisor, Raffe Richmond was omni-present; his total earnings of at least £117.13.8 over the two known years was the second most costly item. Whether any London or ‘stranger’ craftsmen were engaged for more elaborate decorative work at a later date is unknown.

The few payments for materials all occur in 1588; £6 3s 6d was spent on seven barrels of pitch and one of tar in May, £2.12s in July for ‘slatts’ and £7 6s 8d for a ton of lead.³⁵ Haulage, frequently noted elsewhere in the accounts for the carriage of goods from London, barely figures. The pitch and tar were sent down from London at a cost of 12s, a further delivery of pitch and braces cost £2 3s 9d; four cartloads of stone from quarries at Quinton, Marston & Pepworth cost only 2s and 20d. was paid for carriage of glass; lead, lathes and timber came from Banbury in September.³⁶ The previous May stone had been quarried at Chipping Norton and in September men had been paid for work at Guiting quarry; both payments were small.³⁷ It looks as though materials were accounted for separately, probably by Raffe Richmond, unless they had already been stockpiled. It is also possible that much of what was needed had already been used.

³⁰ For an account of the later house see Warriner, *A Prospect of Weston*, pp. 26-37. Plans are in WCRO, CR 1635/451/1-4; drawings by Blore SD91/5(1-3) and Trubshaw SD124/35-37, 39, 43 are deposited in the RIBA Library, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, Dept of Prints and Drawings.

³¹ A fireplace and a stone carved coat of arms also survive, see below.

³² Previous accounts of the house repeat Anthony Wood’s information and have ignored this new source; G. Tyack, *Warwickshire Country Houses*, Warwickshire Local History Society 1994, pp. 216-219; G. Tyack, ‘Dugdale and the Warwickshire Country House’, in C. Dyer and C Richardson, eds., *William Dugdale, historian, 1605-1686: his life, his writings and his county*, Woodbridge 2009, p. 137. Susan M. Cogan, *Catholic Social Networks in Early Modern England: Kinship, Gender, and Coexistence*, Amsterdam 2021, ignores it entirely.

³³ The accounts are transcribed in *But for one matter: Ralph Sheldon of Beoley and Weston (1537-1613)* at [https://www.ralphsheldon1537-1613.info/pdf_pages/Weston-Building-Accounts.pdf].

³⁴ WCRO, CR 2632, fos 189, 211; fos 204, 206.

³⁵ WCRO, CR 2632, fos 173, 206, 208, 210.

³⁶ WCRO, CR 2632, fos 173, 187, 210, 219.

³⁷ WCRO, CR 2632, fo 97.

By the end of August 1588 the skeleton was sufficiently complete for a plasterer to be engaged, possibly by recommendation, certainly ‘on an earnest’ of £1, whether to start soon afterwards or in the more distant future is unknown.³⁸ The geographical range from which men and materials were drawn was narrow; three masons from Burford, another employed at Chipping Norton and joiners, who sound like a team, from Birmingham. Nothing is known about Hall the plumber. The two quarries mentioned were within fifteen miles of the site. 2000 ‘bordes’ were received from Sir Edward Pytte of Kyre Park in 1589; late in December 1588 Raffe Richmond had time to visit him, on the far side of the county, to offer advice on his building plans.³⁹

It looks very likely that Mistress Sheldon, the heir and his wife and the four daughters still unmarried lived in the house throughout the building period. It was Mistress Sheldon who celebrated the laying of the foundations in March 1587.⁴⁰ The peripatetic Ralph Sheldon certainly did not; two entries in 1587 refer to ‘money left to pay workmen when I am in London’.⁴¹ His absences are traceable in the accounts and only letters reveal his occasional presence at Weston; in late September 1587, perhaps preparing for the annual audit; in March with Mrs Sheldon, June and September 1588, and in January and December 1589.⁴² Again, the question arises of what had previously and perhaps still existed, and what, exactly, was under construction.

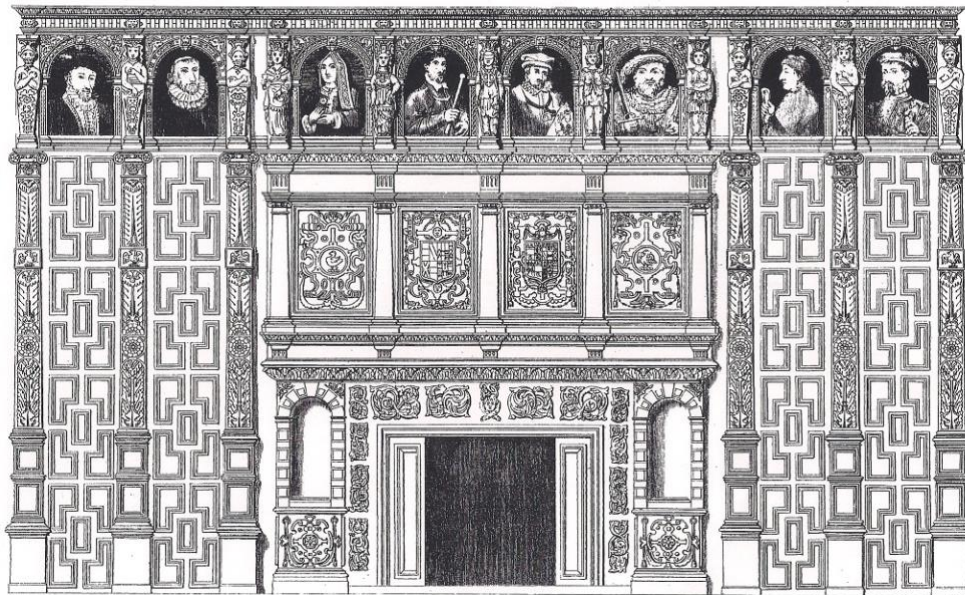


Figure 3: The fireplace, panelling and portrait frieze, said to be drawn by Richard Bridgens, published by Henry Shaw, *Details of Elizabethan Architecture*, London, Pickering, 1839. © Hilary L Turner

³⁸ WCRO, CR 2632, fo 212, August 1588.

³⁹ Mrs Baldwin Chylde, ‘The Building of Kyre Park’, *The Antiquary*, xxi, 1890, pp. 202-05, 261-64; xxii, pp. 24-26, 50-53, esp. p.25, p.204.

⁴⁰ WCRO, CR 2632, fo 50.

⁴¹ WCRO, CR 2632, 6 May, £53, fo 58; 22 October, £10, fo 122.

⁴² BL, Add Ms 36901, fo 13, Surrey History Centre, LM/COR/3/419; WCRO, CR 2632, fos 49, 191, 219; BL, Add Ms 36901, fos 6, 28.

There is no evidence for the fashioning of the decorative items, the frieze of 22 portrait heads, its position known though only described much later, and the four unusual tapestry-woven maps.⁴³ In addition to their intrinsic interest, both might seem to have exercised an important influence on the plan of the house, positioned on opposite sides of the building. Their total dimensions, each around 75-80 feet, are consistent with Walpole's estimate of the length of the house suggesting that each plays an important role in reconstructing, and perhaps-establishing, the floor plan. The frieze in particular, its details discussed later, was unlikely to be moved from its original placing (see Figure 3).⁴⁴ The theoretically more mobile tapestries pose greater difficulties.

The tapestries, commissioned around 1590, effectively offered a panoramic view across England from London to the Bristol Channel, focussed on one of the four counties where Ralph held land, had friends and family - Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Oxfordshire (including London!).⁴⁵ By 1781 certainly, and probably long before, they had been damaged, deliberately, to the point where they could no longer hang. They were not listed in the sale catalogue. Though by 1781 the Hall was noticeably under-furnished, Richard Gough remarked, somewhat vaguely, that the Elizabethan tapestry maps had hung there. How he came to possess the sections he later donated to the Bodleian Library is unknown. Only one, Worcestershire, was recognizable though missing large sections; the other twenty-four pieces he acquired, later restored as Oxfordshire, had been sewn in random positions to a backing clearly only to preserve them.⁴⁶

Some sixty-seventy years after the Elizabethan tapestries were complete two were copied. Details were altered, particularly in the corners of the field; each was framed by borders in a fashionable picture frame style. One of the older examples, Warwickshire, had its Elizabethan border hacked off and replaced to match the rewoven examples. Eighteenth century viewers referred to these tapestries, not to the originals.

Descriptive Sources

Despite the wide network of family connections this large house saw few visitors. The observations of one of the earliest, familiar with it over a period of fifteen years, Anthony Wood (1632-95) the Oxfordshire diarist and self-appointed amanuensis of Ralph 'the Great' Sheldon (1623-84) have already been remarked on.⁴⁷ Two later

⁴³ Further images are available Hilary L Turner, *But for one matter: Ralph Sheldon 1537-1613* Chapter Twelve on-line at [<https://www.ralphsheldon1537-1613.info/pdf-pages/012-Chapter-Twelve.pdf>].

⁴⁴ Dendrochronological testing on four of the heads provided a date for the timber felling 1589-95, Catherine Daunt, *Portrait sets in Tudor and Jacobean England*, unpublished but on-line PhD., University of Sussex, 2015, 2 vols, i, p. 124, ii, Appendix Table 6.

⁴⁵ Hilary L. Turner, *No Mean Prospect: Ralph Sheldon's Tapestry Maps*, Plotwood Press, 2010.

⁴⁶ Bodleian Library Records, d.1137 for photographs of 1894. Oxfordshire has seen three restorations, in 1894-5, 1913 and 2017-18; detailed accounts are deposited in the Bodleian Library. The most recent has dramatically changed the appearance of the original by moving an isolated fragment, showing Towcester, closer to the Bicester area.

⁴⁷ Two of his five comments were about the paintings.

visitors were also more impressed by the contents of two rooms than by the house; none of the descriptions overflows with detail. The first was George Vertue who in 1738 noted several individual pictures, the display of portrait heads and the tapestry maps ‘of all England divided into five or six counties’.⁴⁸ In 1747 John Loveday, antiquarian and traveller, wrote that ‘this magnificent large old house, built of stone, has a noble Gallery well-proportioned. In the Great Parlour are the celebrated tapestry-hangings, being spacious and very distinct Maps of several counties in England...’.⁴⁹ He too described the portrait heads. Twenty years later Horace Walpole drew a more detailed picture:

Weston in Warwickshire, M^r Sheldon’s. good Situation with wood and water. disparted. pretty gatehouse with bow-windows. very ancient House, in bad repair. some windows modernized. large hall almost in ruins. old cieling. James 1st chimneys. Handsome great dining-room with chimney d^o. Gallery at top of the House 160 feet long, trunk cieling.⁵⁰

In the 1790s, however, the indefatigable traveller John Byng thought the house of so little account that he passed it by, observing only ‘On the right, 2 miles from Compton, stands Weston, the seat of Mr Sheldon’s, but I did not suppose it worthy an inspection.’ Seven years later he passed up a second opportunity with the words ‘The old seat of the Sheldons – Weston House, now abandoned by that family is lett to Ld. ----- for a hunting seat.’⁵¹

These sketchy accounts are supplemented by a series of drawings, the majority only of the exterior. The earliest was executed by the surveyor and cartographer Henry Beighton in 1716;⁵² it depicts an almost bird’s eye view of the house and its gatehouse set in elaborate formal gardens against a wider background of hills to the west (Fig. 1). Whether the drawing was commissioned by the Sheldon family or was intended always for inclusion in a revised version of Dugdale’s *Antiquities of Warwickshire* where it was first published is not known.⁵³ This and two other drawings were listed in the auction catalogue. They may possibly be identifiable with one depicting the house seen at a distance from the southeast; its companion may be that showing the gatehouse.⁵⁴ Another, drawn in 1773 by an un-named artist, was

⁴⁸ George Vertue, *Notebooks IV*, Walpole Society, xxiv, (1936), p.140. It is not clear whether he saw six tapestries or tapestries each showing six counties.

⁴⁹ *John Loveday of Caversham* (1711-8), ed. Sarah Markham, London 1984, pp. 374, 538-39, 23 July 1747.

⁵⁰ *Journals of Visits to Country Seats etc*, ed Paget Toynbee, Walpole Society, xvi. (1927-28), pp. 9-80, especially p.62, no. 33. Walpole’s information about the gallery at least was confirmed by the property’s later owner Sir George Philips in his autobiography: Warriner, *A Prospect of Weston*, p.25: WCRO, CR 1381/1. Walpole later purchased the three tapestries hanging in the room, the two seventeenth-century copies of Oxfordshire and Worcestershire and Warwickshire with its new border.

⁵¹ *The Torrington Diaries containing the tours through England and Wales of the Hon. John Byng (1742-1813) between the years 1781 and 1794*, ed C. Bruyn Andrews, 4 vols, London 1938, 4 vols, 7 July 1785: i, p.222; 4 July 1792: iii, p. 155. The lessee was the Earl of Powis: SCLA, ER3/4996.

⁵² For a brief biography of Beighton see Alan F, Cook, ‘Beighton, Henry (1686/7-1743)’, *ODNB*, 2008. His series of drawings have yet to be analysed. His engraver was Elisha Kirkall see Timothy Clayton, ‘Kirkhall, Elisha, (1681/2–1742)’, *ODNB*, 2008.

⁵³ W. Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*, 2 vols, London 1730, i, between pages 582-83, reprinted with same pagination in 1973.

⁵⁴ The first is privately owned; the second is at WCRO, PV COM LON Wes 6.

engraved by Godfrey and published in the *Antiquarian Repertory*⁵⁵ Seen from the same angle as Beighton had adopted but from ground level there are some differences. Its fenestration differs from that shown by Beighton, significantly on the east front, less so on the south; a porch is shown on the entrance façade on which stone-carved arms are visible.⁵⁶ Beighton's formal gardens have given way to grassland and, if ever walls abutted the gatehouse as he indicated, they no longer stood. Another, uncertainly dated to 1787 and in a private collection, more closely resembles an architectural drawing than an artistic presentation; it depicts only the east front and confirms many of Beighton's details.⁵⁷ The ill-proportioned head-on sketch by Thomas Ward, made with the intention of producing a further revision of Dugdale's *Antiquities*, clearly resembles Beighton's though emphasizing the width of the façade rather than its height.⁵⁸ A drawing dated to around 1829 was engraved by Thomas Radclyffe, partner in a Birmingham firm which itself advertised as engravers, copperplate printers, stationers, print sellers and bookbinders;⁵⁹ it is remarkably similar to the drawing by the architect Edward Blore.⁶⁰ Neither adds anything to the positions of doors, windows and chimneys already seen elsewhere, but at least neither contains contradictory information. With the exception of Ward's unsophisticated illustration, the drawings are sufficiently different in detail rather than substance to suggest that each is an independent production.

Two estate maps, independently surveyed, confirm that the house, oriented north-west/south-east, was, as Beighton depicted, built on a square rather than a rectangular plan. The first is by Edward Cherry of 1817, the second an unsigned production possibly of 1824.⁶¹

The most detailed information about the interior of the house comes from documents which, in different ways and for different reasons, list the family possessions following the death of William Sheldon in September 1780 in Ghent. The event set in train two auctions, the gradual sale of the estate piece by piece and eventually the demolition of the Elizabethan house. A copy of an inventory of William's few belongings taken to Ghent, sold to cover his debts abroad, and a longer

⁵⁵ Probably Richard Bernard Godfrey: L. Peltz, Godfrey, Richard Bernard, (b. c.1728, d. in or after 1795), *ODNB*, 2008: F. Grose, *Antiquarian Repertory*, i, London, 1775, facing p. 220 where the estate's history is given, somewhat inaccurately as is now known.

⁵⁶ The porch closely resembles that of the old house at Michelgrove, Sussex, owned by the Shelley family; the marriage of Elizabeth Shelley with Edward Sheldon was celebrated in 1708, WCRO, CR 4502/7. Porch pictured in Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan County House*, p.100.

⁵⁷ The drawing is plate 3 in Warriner, *A Prospect of Weston*.

⁵⁸ Ward's manuscript drawings, BL, Add Mss 29264-65, ii, fos 215-216.

⁵⁹ First publication in William Smith, *A New and Compendious History of the County of Warwick*, Birmingham 1830, opposite p. 46. Grove's *Dictionary of Art* has a biography of an Edward Radclyffe; Thomas is described in the National Portrait Gallery catalogue as active 1817-25. No relationship is known.

⁶⁰ Blore drawings BL, Add Mss 42036, fo 71 (the Hall), (Weston from SE).

⁶¹ WCRO, CR 1635/355, (Cherry); CR 1635/356, 1824. The county survey executed by C. & J. Greenwood in 1820-21, published by George Pringle, London March 1822, is less clear.

inventory of the furnishings at Beoley, of the London house in Upper Brook Street, Grosvenor Square and at Weston survives.⁶²

Two sales, both held at the house but widely separated in time, were required to dispose of the family's accumulated possessions. The first, its catalogue long known, occupied eleven days from 27 August 1781 and was conducted by the London firm, Christie's and Ansell.⁶³ The second, about which information has only recently come to light, was held in May 1823; the auctioneer was Thomas Parry of Shipston.⁶⁴

Beighton's drawing

The most informative drawing is Henry Beighton's bird's eye view of 1716 although, like those of his near-contemporaries Jan Kyp and Leonard Knyff,⁶⁵ it was intended to show the house to advantage and was not an architectural drawing. Where one can compare Beighton's depictions of other houses which still survive in the county – for example at Charlecote, Castle Bromwich and Blyth Hall - they prove to be remarkably close to what is now visible.⁶⁶ There is therefore reason to think that his rendering of a house now demolished is likely to be a reliable guide to its external appearance, though, as we shall see, there are some problematic points. One is his representation of the appearance of the parkland and the detailed layout of the surrounding garden bounded by a wall, better suited to early eighteenth-century fashion than to Tudor taste; it may well be little more than a formalized image of what Beighton thought ought to be there.

Several buildings other than the Tudor house are shown. To the north is a long structure, its three chimneys suggesting ancillary domestic uses. In the wood yard below are three other buildings past which the 1781 auctioneer reached the perimeter of the enclosed formal gardens to sell off the contents of the 'lodge' – the Elizabethan gatehouse – which included a 'whole length stone figure', a marble group of four dolphins and a pair of iron gates. In Beighton's drawing at least it alone broke the line of an enclosing wall from which rise two structures, possibly banqueting houses; they are not mentioned in the 1781 catalogue.

The picture is dominated by a three-storey stone-built quadrangular house arranged round an internal courtyard, (see Figure 1). The orientation is approximately NW/SE but for convenience the four wings will be referred to here as North, South,

⁶² TNA, PROB 31/722/683, dated 1783. It differs little from the 1781 sale catalogue but it is unclear which listing is the earlier.

⁶³ Sale Cat 1781 inventoried by Messrs Higgens and Richards, TNA, PROB 31/722/683, 7th page from end. The printed catalogue is now on-line, see n. 26.

⁶⁴ Advertised in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 10 May 1823, sale held 13 May.

⁶⁵ J. Kyp and L. Knyff, *Britannia Illustrata: Or Views of Several of the Queens Palaces, as Also of the Principal seats of the Nobility and Gentry of Great Britain, Curiously Engraven on 80 Copper Plates*, London (1707).

⁶⁶ Dismissal of his talent by John Harris, *The artist and the country house: a history of country house and garden view painting in Britain 1540-1870*, London 1985, p. 156, is unmerited; Richard Gough spoke highly of him: he 'never got his due',...and for [?pleasure] accuracy and expedition had few equals. He left behind him in his neighbourhood numbers of excellent [drawings] who own them for their maker...', Richard Gough, *British Topography*, iii, p.311, 1782 edition only; Bod Lib, Gough Gen Top 363-366.

East and West. Each was pitch roofed, apparently stone-slated. At ground level all the drawings show the main entrance at the centre of the East wall, though disagreeing on its external appearance. Beighton's door was positioned between two shallow projecting window bays; the façade ended on either side in two projecting bays with bay windows on ground and first floors. These too were pitch-roofed. On both the South and the West wings Beighton indicates five projecting bays, of irregular height on the south, but of uniform height on the west. The North front, not visible from any of the adopted viewpoints, shows no sign of gabled projections. None of these irregularities of execution are incompatible with a late sixteenth-century date.

Comparing the representations of the east front, however, some discrepancies between the drawings become apparent. Three, Beighton, the *Antiquarian Repertory* and a third dated around 1787, which we shall call group A, suggest gabled projections at the south-west and south-east corners; group B drawings, Blore and Radclyffe both of the late 1820s, neither of which show the north-west corner, show a square, flat-roofed crenellated tower at both south-east and south-west corners, while an undated sketch, taken from a slightly different angle, depicts a tower at the south-east and a gabled projection at the south-west. Whether gable or tower, its windows suggest internal communication only on the ground and first floors; it is unlikely that it housed a stair.

The three drawings in group A suggest that the roofing of the east front became very complex in both south-east and north-east corners where the two separate gabled roofs of the corner projections met the continuous roofline of the façade. Beneath the gables would have been an elaborately interlocking network of trusses and beams.

Although Beighton's drawing shows a building on a square plan comparable to many Elizabethan new-build plans it does not exclude the possibility of a building enlarged in several stages. The complexity of roof lines may be the key to unlocking the building's history and the means to reconcile the conflicting, but not necessarily incompatible, evidence for construction in two stages by both William and Ralph Sheldon.⁶⁷ The West wing is the shortest roofline; it might represent an older structure.⁶⁸ The balanced length of the north and south wings might indicate that they were additions, turning the older building into an E-plan house, possibly executed by William. That hypothesis might mean that the long East front was no more than Ralph's addition to an already existing E-plan building, re-designed to be more imposing than a simple courtyard approach, but creating the awkward conglomeration of roof lines at the corners. The two-fold purpose of his addition was to create an imposing Hall and accommodate a Long Gallery, clearly said in the eighteenth century to be on the top floor and 160 feet in length. The frontage itself was divided into a central section of 80 feet (to include the entrance and the two shallower bays)

⁶⁷ See note 7.

⁶⁸ Professor Mark Girouard (*pers. comm.*).

with 40 feet allowed for the width of each of the two more substantial projecting bays and the corridors behind them.

This façade changed the axis of the house as Geoffrey Tyack noted.⁶⁹ Ralph's main entrance, leading, unusually, directly into the Hall, was on the east; if his west wing represents the older house, it *had* stood much closer to the steepest side of the hill, its entrance on its west side, presumably into a Hall, the later Dining Room.⁷⁰ The only comfortable approach to the new building would have been to come round the side of the hill. The topography of the site might therefore explain why, to enlarge the property, Ralph turned its axis to face an approach from the more accessible slope, making available ground suitable for the creation of an impressive façade.

The divisions of that frontage may have preserved the size of the older house, determined the measurements of two large internal spaces and in turn dictated the scale of the known new decorations, the four tapestry maps, totalling 75-80 feet and the frieze of portrait heads, a minimum of 75.6 feet long. These divisions might therefore resolve the conflicting explanations for the original building. If, on the other hand, Ralph's house is entirely new build, it is tempting to suggest that the length of the façade was a deliberate calculation, planned from the outset to fit those two decorative features. The tapestries were to be hung in the Hall, its central section 80 feet, the space balanced on the other side of the courtyard by the grandest room, its panelling surmounted by a portrait frieze.

Externally, the east front was imposing in its austerity, devoid of any ornamentation whether strapwork decoration or use of dressed stone to frame windows or wall corners. Some features one might expect to see are also absent; Beighton's version appears to lack dripstones over the windows,⁷¹ there are no drainpipes nor is there any guttering, both of which it would have been useful and practical to install either on the east front or in the angle where the south bay meets the south wall.⁷² Such details could, of course, have been omitted in the interests of artistic presentation.⁷³

Beighton's fenestration differs from that of the other drawings, in size as in arrangement. On the east front, he depicts a double height window to either side of the entrance, which makes no allowance for rooms on the middle floor (as he showed in the projecting bays) and at first glance suggests the possibility of a double-height Hall, as at Chastleton. However, such windows do not appear in any other drawing. and the idea of a double-height hall is hard to substantiate from analysis of the sale catalogue.⁷⁴ It seems more likely that the drawings of 1773 and ?1787 which both

⁶⁹ Tyack, 'Country-house building in Warwickshire 1500-1914', p. 100.

⁷⁰ It seems unlikely that Ralph would have replaced an entrance on its eastern side by a central chimney on what became the inner courtyard wall.

⁷¹ Shown by Blore and Radclyffe.

⁷² Drainpipes are also absent from J. Skelton, *Antiquities of Oxfordshire*, Oxford 1827, Chastleton, and from Beighton's other drawings.

⁷³ A later source, John Nichols claimed that the royal coat of arms was placed over the entrance, shown on the drawings of 1773 and 1787. They are not shown by either Beighton or Ward.

⁷⁴ Anthony Wood's statement about the coin collection being in a small room over the Hall also excludes this interpretation.

show regular fenestration across the front on all three floors, are, in this respect, more accurate. The exception, again in all the drawings, is beneath the roof of the Long Gallery. No drawing suggests that it was lit on the east side though, if Beighton's hints about the west wing are accurate, there may have been light from smaller windows on the Gallery's inward-looking side. Its main light source was a large five-light window on the south minimized by Beighton alone, probably matched at the north end. Along the south front there is a small difference between Blore, who shows three narrow windows on the middle floor slightly out of line with others on the same floor; the same front is regular in the Radclyffe drawing (1829), which agrees with Beighton.

The most problematic element of Beighton's drawing is his representation of chimney stacks, (see Figure 1).⁷⁵ Thirteen stacks are shown; seven are placed at irregular intervals on the walls of the inner court, four on outer side of the east front and two on the exterior of the north wall. None served the garrets on the top floor. Only two stacks are shown with three separate chimneys, those on the inner East and West walls, but only the Hall and Gallery (E) and the Great Dining Room and the Library (W) were likely to have been heated. In this respect the drawing may be more impressionistic than real.⁷⁶ Three are positioned on the inner South wall of the courtyard and must have contained two flues each on two floors. The two on the outer north wall are irregularly positioned, but again served only two floors. Four decorated the façade, shown in all the drawings; those to left and right probably heated rooms on all three floors in the projecting bays, those in the centre only rooms above the Hall on the middle floor (thus contradicting Beighton's fenestration). This adds up to only 28 fireplaces, far less than the 38 hearths recorded in 1670s, but not inconsistent with the rooms where a fireplace can be deduced from the 1781 catalogue when many rooms were provided with fire irons.

Some of those fireplaces were highly decorated. In 1781 'five marble slabs and sundry chimney pieces' were stacked in the passage between the Hall and the Great Stair.⁷⁷ Some carried the Sheldon coat of arms; in a letter of March 1676 discussing the tricking of his arms Ralph the Great observed that 'all our chimney peeces at Weston have clusters of grapes'.⁷⁸ Sections of one, quartering the Sheldon arms with those of Markham, seems to have been incorporated into the later house and survives now in private ownership.⁷⁹ Part of another, showing the arms of Ralph Sheldon and his wife Anne Throckmorton, which might also have been above a fireplace, now form the back wall of a drinking trough in Little Wolford; unfortunately the stones have been placed upside down.

⁷⁵ Their positioning is also consistent with the theory that the west wing represents the footprint of an older house.

⁷⁶ No fireplace can be distinguished in the Blore drawing said to be of the hall: BL, Add Mss 42036, fo72.

⁷⁷ Sale Cat 1781, Day 3, p. 19.

⁷⁸ Bod Lib, MS Wood. F.4, no. 52.

⁷⁹ F Sydney Eden, F Sydney Eden, 'A Sheldon Mantel-piece', *The Connoisseur*, vol.100, no. 432, August, 1937, pp. 78-79.

In the reconstruction which follows chimney positions shown by Beighton have been combined with his placing of windows. The result suggests that at least on the ground and middle floors the rooms opened into each other, a familiar late sixteenth-century arrangement, not onto a corridor, (see Figure 4). However, on three sides of the top floor there was probably a passageway. The rooms itemized in the auction catalogue appear to indicate that there were five rooms in the north and south wings on ground and first floor levels; if the internal width of these wings was approximately 35 feet and their length 80 feet this would indicate a series of rooms

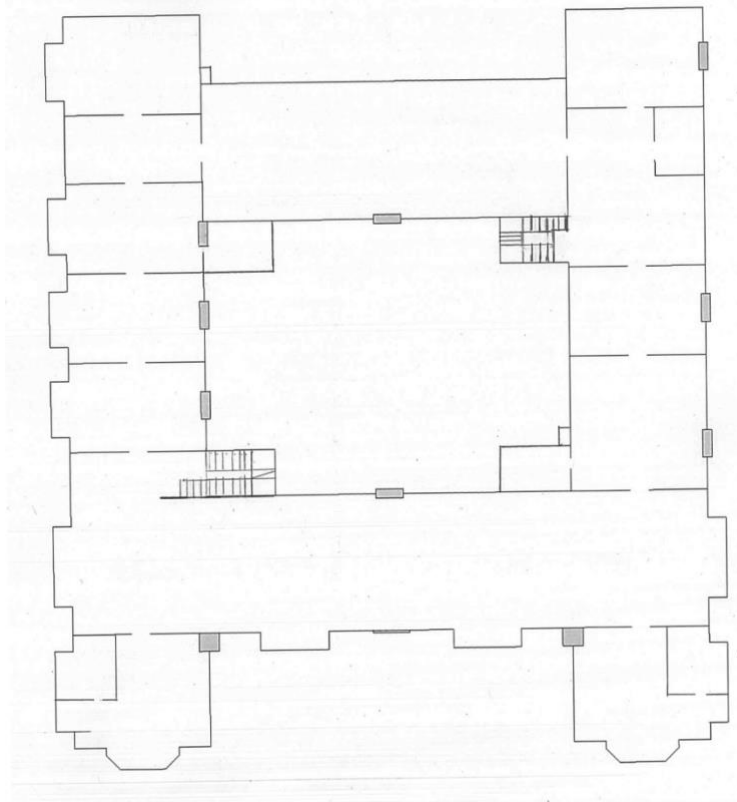


Figure 4: Conjectural plan of the Ground Floor of Weston, © Hilary L Turner

measuring approximately 30 x 16 feet. Details of the west wing are not shown on any drawing, but other evidence indicates that its ground floor was occupied by a huge single compartment, the later Dining Room which might possibly have been the former Hall. The space above, probably Wood's 'room of state,' equated to that called the Library in 1781.⁸⁰ Bed chambers on the middle floor of the frontage could have been up to 40 feet long and 16 wide. Walpole's information would seem to rule out any possibility that this area was the Long Gallery and existence of dressing rooms listed in auction catalogue suggests it was not the Library. The dimensions of three separate carpets do no more than indicate the minimum size of the named rooms; a Turkey carpet measuring 28 x 17 feet was sold from the Great Drawing Room, an

⁸⁰ Vertue named pictures he saw in the Library; it is not clear whether this was still Wood's positioning in space next the Long Gallery or on the middle floor above the Great Dining Room.

Axminster measuring 15 x 13 feet from the Crimson Parlour and a Wilton measuring 10ft 6 inches x 8ft 6 inches from the late Mr Sheldon's Dressing Room.⁸¹

Beighton's remarkably unimpressive central entrance may have been remedied by the addition of a three-columned porch shown first in 1773.⁸² The entrance opened into a long Hall, very like the later Aston Hall, Birmingham or the Proscholium in the Bodleian Library. It was lit by a large window on the south side, almost certainly with a corresponding window at the north end, in turn suggesting that it lacked either lateral walls or the conventional screen/s. Access to the rest of the house was simply across its vast floor space to lobbies either end. Sir George Philips remarked on the hall 'having been a handsome room, resembling the Hall at Crewe Hall'.⁸³ A drawing by Blore, though labelled as being of the hall, shows a trunk ceiling, known only in the Long Gallery.⁸⁴

Communication between floors was achieved by the two staircases mentioned in the 1781 sale catalogue – the 'best' and the 'back' stair. It seems likely that they were housed in the towers positioned diagonally opposite each other in the south-east and north-west corners of the courtyard projecting into the courtyard, as in the Bodleian Library's quadrangle, rather than being accommodated internally or protruding from the external walls of the building. An open space like a landing, though the eighteenth-century term called it a lobby, seems to have existed where the stairs reached each upper landing. However the stairs may not have ended in exactly corresponding positions on the N and S sides; it seems possible that the south-east stair communicated with the south side of the upper floors whereas the north-west stair opened onto the west side.

Internal layout: the sale catalogue

The 1781 sale catalogue has been used here as though it were an inventory; no earlier inventory survives. Sources for the internal layout are therefore very much later than the date of construction. Despite the catalogue's wealth of detail it is difficult to be certain of the each room's usage; the suggestions here must remain conjectural. Room names had certainly changed, though their function – for example the many parlours – may not have done; pictures, previously known to have been elsewhere, had migrated, confusing rather than helping identification of rooms.⁸⁵ The auction catalogue has other disadvantages. With two exceptions, fittings were not for sale and so were not described.⁸⁶ Nor does the catalogue clearly indicate each day's starting point or at what point or with which room a different floor has been reached. In this

⁸¹ Sale Cat 1781, pp. 37, 22, 44.

⁸² A comparable example decorated the old house of the Shelleys at Michelgrove, Sussex with whom the Sheldons inter-married, see n. 56.

⁸³ WCRO, CR 1381, typescript vol. 3, 61; The Carved Parlour at Crew Hall, drawn by Joseph Nash is reproduced in *Old Furniture*, vol viii, no. 30, November 1929, p. 107.

⁸⁴ BL, Add Ms 42036, fo72.

⁸⁵ Pictures seen by Vertue in the Gallery had moved to lower rooms, *Notebooks*, Walpole Society xxiv, (1935-6), p. 140; those he noted in the Library had also moved.

⁸⁶ Exceptions are the frieze of portrait heads and fifty-four yards of crimson silk and damask hangings covered the walls of the King's Bed Chamber, sold for £6 15s. (Cat. Day 6, p. 32).

reconstruction mention near a stair of a lobby or a closet filled with prints and drawings has been taken to mean a change in floor level. Only one room was certainly omitted; the space employed as a chapel does not appear in the description of the top floor, its presence betrayed only because of a subsequent reference to the chamber beneath it.⁸⁷ It is impossible to tell whether the auctioneer retraced his steps past rooms whose contents he had just sold or moved continuously forwards passing through rooms to which he would return another day, see Appendix One. He had to keep control over those present; both known copies of the catalogue list the names of the purchasers, between twenty-five and thirty each day, but it is impossible to estimate the total number of those present. Almost certainly, however, the auctioneer did not lead his party first up and then down the same stairs. His route seems to have been planned to keep bidders away from men removing goods already sold.

His route began on the top floor; reference to garrets to the left suggests the starting point was the top of the stair in the north-west corner. Progress was then past the garrets on the west side into the named rooms on the south side, and across the Gallery without stopping, back through un-named rooms described as being ‘to the right-hand of the back stair’, that is to say on the north side, to return to the back stair. **Day Two** began on the middle floor at the top of the Great Stair and included two rooms on the south side before ascending to the Long Gallery. On **Day Three** the auctioneer returned to the southern bay on the middle floor and then descended into the Great Hall to end at the foot of the Great Stair. He moved upstairs again to the middle floor through the rooms on the east front and the north wing on **Day Four** and into the Library and adjacent rooms on the west side on **Day Five**. **Day Six** traced a route through the grandiosely titled ground floor rooms on the south side. **Day Seven** began in the butler’s pantry, through his bedroom, continued into the Great Drawing Room on the west and directly back into the north wing to the Smoking Rooms and the Servants’ Hall. **Day Eight** covered the kitchen and the ground floor bedroom of the late Mr Sheldon; on **Day Nine** it was the turn of the outhouses leading towards the Lodge (the former gatehouse) before returning to the cellars in the house. The final four days were occupied by the sale of the books in the Library valued by Messrs Dodsley & Fletcher at a cost of £2.13s 4d.

There is, however, good reason to regard the 1781 catalogue as a reliable guide to room divisions since there is little evidence for major internal reconstruction, for which there was scant money to spare. Wood’s brief remarks indicating the positions of his patron’s collections split between the middle floor north and a room in the top of the northern bay, the seventeenth-century libraries, may indicate the space which Vertue also called the Library, but the top rooms, beneath the leaking roof, had by 1781 been put to different uses; one was the Nursery, while the appellation of Library, housing the 4000 books sold in 1781, was now attached to space on the middle floor on the west side; it had, presumably, been the Elizabethan ‘great chamber’.

⁸⁷ Sale Cat 1781, Day 2, p.11. The altar at Cherington church is said to be made up from panels in its screen, Warriner, *A Prospect of Weston*, p. 30; *VCH*, v, p. 55.

Attempted reconstruction of the auctioneer's route confirms the suggestion that the internal layout had remained untouched although room names, uses and their decoration had altered, reflecting eighteenth rather than sixteenth century decorative taste.⁸⁸ Three rooms were known by the name of an occupant; The Maids of Honour's Room, Gardener's Room and old Mr Sheldon's bed chamber.⁸⁹ Most were named after their decoration; the Green Worsted damask and the Green Morine bed chambers, the blue stripe parlour, the crimson parlour, the crimson bed chamber and two chambers, one painted blue, the other green. But, just as there is no information about the construction of the porch shown in several drawings later than Beighton's,⁹⁰ neither is there any detail for the updating and redecoration of the rooms, many of which had originally probably been hung with tapestry. Twenty-four fragments were stored in the Maids' room but, apart from the seventeenth century editions of the tapestry maps with picture frame borders in the Great Drawing Room, only two rooms were still so decorated, one of them with 'historic' tapestries – that is to say pieces showing narrative episodes.⁹¹ Some of the room names have given rise to colourful myths; Nichols' account of the house states that one was called the Queen's Room in commemoration of a visit of Queen Elizabeth in 1575, an event which probably never happened.⁹² The room does not appear by that name in the 1781 catalogue. He associated the Maids of Honour's Chamber with the same occasion. However, two members of the Sheldon family served at Court in that position in the later seventeenth-century suggesting the names originated then contemporaneous with the change in ownership of the house. Frances, daughter of Edward Sheldon of Ditchford, was maid of honour to Queen Catherine of Braganza, wife of king Charles II;⁹³ rather later her niece Catherine Sheldon attended Mary of Modena, wife of king James II.⁹⁴ No one has yet tried to identify the king after whom the King's Bed Chamber was named.⁹⁵

Two rooms in particular made the greatest impression on later visitors. Never described in detail they may be the key to understanding the Elizabethan house plan. One was the Long Gallery which according to Walpole was at the top of the house,

⁸⁸ An account book of Edward Sheldon (d.1736) does not indicate that any money was spent on the house, Bodl. Ms Eng Misc fo 6.

⁸⁹ Two of these must be of late seventeenth-century origin; for the Maids of Honour see nn. 93, 94; Gardner was a late seventeenth-century steward; old Mr Sheldon probably refers to William d. 1780.

⁹⁰ Thomas Ward's drawing excepted.

⁹¹ Sale Cat 1781, Days 1, 4, pp. 5, 7, 24.

⁹² John Nichols, *Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 vols. London 1823, i, p. xvii; the more recent edition of *John Nichols's The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I: A New Edition of the Early Modern Sources*, ed. Elizabeth Goldring et al, 5 vols, Oxford 2014, ii, pp. 349 n.629, 358, says it did not. His statement may originate in confusion over the location of Compton in the Hole; shown on Speed's county map this is Compton Wynyates, not Long Compton, the parish in which Weston stood. On Progress from Compton Wynyates to Sudeley Queen Elizabeth had little reason to divert southwards to Weston.

⁹³ Edward d. 1687; his wife was Mary daughter of Lionel Wake living 1684; Frances died at Lisbon 15 Jan 1705, WCRO, HR 91.

⁹⁴ Catherine was the daughter of Ralph Sheldon of Ditchford (d. 1723) who married Elizabeth Dunn of West Heath Worcestershire, WCRO, HR 91. Catherine's death is unrecorded.

⁹⁵ E. A. B. Barnard noted a reference in an old minute book of Warwick Corporation to a visit by Charles I in 1636, BA&H Barnard Miscellanea, bundle 77.

accessed via the best stair and lit at one end certainly by a large window, probably balanced by another at the other end. In addition to its length Walpole also noted its trunk ceiling, meaning that it was barrel-vaulted, closely resembling that at both the later Burton Agnes and Chastleton.⁹⁶ It would have served to conceal the elaborate but awkward articulation of the trusses necessary to support the roofing of the two short wings which projected at the north and south ends of the east front. Although Vertue noted the best of the pictures he saw there, by 1781 they had been moved downstairs; the remaining furnishings were scant and worn.

The other room to arrest the eighteenth century visitor's attention was known by a variety of names – the Dining Room (Wood), the Great Room (Vertue), the Great Parlour (Loveday), the Great Dining Room (Walpole) and the Great Drawing Room (1781). The 1781 catalogue suggests strongly that it was on the ground floor; the auctioneer started in the butler's pantry, likely to be close to the kitchen, passed to his bedchamber and into this room. He then went back out into service rooms in the kitchen corridor along the North wing.⁹⁷

All the eighteenth-century accounts agree that the room was highly decorated, containing the frieze of portrait heads and map tapestries, though the observers did not realize these were the two seventeenth-century editions and the re-bordered Elizabethan Warwickshire. There were no other pictures. Later information about this room comes from a partial account of the house published in 1839 by the engraver Henry Shaw. He alone described it as having been panelled throughout, possibly the original Elizabethan plan which was later concealed by the three later tapestries. He produced a drawing, topped by the portrait frieze supported on long tapering Ionic pilasters on high pedestals, each charged with the family crest, a shelldrake.⁹⁸ The frieze was said to have been carved in oak containing a series of portraits of sovereigns and statesmen, native and foreign (Figure 3).⁹⁹ The fireplace, said to have projected no more than eighteen inches into the room, was 13ft 6 inches high, the lower part being eight feet high and supported on broad piers each with a semi-circular niche; when drawn the fireplace itself was shown as only 6ft 6 inches high and 5ft 10 inches wide. As shown in 1839 the total height of the overmantel was 15ft 1 inch, its second storey armorial, divided into four compartments; the central two panels carried, separately, the arms of Sheldon and of Markham. Shaw also reproduced some individual details of the panelling.¹⁰⁰ The size of the room went unrecorded.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Rosalys Coope, 'The 'Long Gallery': its origins, development, use and decoration', *Architectural History*, xxix, (1986), pp. 43-72, p. 55; R Coope, 'Gallery use and meaning', *Architectural History*, xxvii, 1984, pp. 449-60.

⁹⁷ Sale Cat 1781, Day 7, pp. 36-38.

⁹⁸ Henry Shaw, *Details of Elizabethan Architecture*, London, Pickering, 1839, pp. 12-14 + plate 111.

⁹⁹ H. L. Turner, 'Glimpses of a gallery: the maps and 'paynted pictures' of Robert Hare', *Bodleian Library Record*, xxvi, (2013), pp. 102-112.

¹⁰⁰ Shaw, *Details of Elizabethan Architecture*, p.15.

¹⁰¹ Its Turkey carpet (the most expensive item after the three tapestry maps), measured 28 x 17 feet (Sale Cat 1781, Day 7, p.36). In an age where carpeting was not wall to wall this indicates a considerably larger room.

By the time Shaw published, the house had been demolished. He attributed his pictorial details to sketches by Richard Bridgens (1786-1846), in which case these were probably made in the period when the fate of the Tudor house was under discussion between rival architects. Thomas Harrison, architect of Chester castle and bridge,¹⁰² recommended restoration; later, Edward Blore advised demolition. Blore and Bridgens had previously collaborated on Sir Walter Scott's new residence at Abbotsford and may therefore have worked together at Weston since Bridgens himself was based largely in Birmingham.¹⁰³ But, born only in 1786, he could not have seen the portraits in situ since they had been sold in 1781 and presumably removed very soon thereafter.¹⁰⁴ He could however have sketched the panelling and the now empty frames before the demolition team arrived in 1828. When Shaw used those sketches he decided to insert the portraits. However, they are not in chronological order, which, if the eighteenth-century accounts are correct it seems they were, nor do his representations consistently resemble the few known surviving pieces. The question is further complicated by a sketch, with measurements, preserved in a collection of tracings by A.T. Bolton.¹⁰⁵ Measurements are clearly marked; whether the work is Bolton's, the measurements inserted from Shaw's text, or Bridgens' original measured sketch, is uncertain. There are, therefore, some questions about the accuracy of these details; nevertheless the dimensions of the portraits have been used to confirm attribution of similarly shaped and sized examples to Ralph's frieze.¹⁰⁶

It is logical to suggest that this space, the Dining/Drawing Room, should match the dimensions of the same space on the other side of the house, the Hall. The former's original width can be calculated from the measurements given in the drawing, the dimensions of the empty frames, multiplied by the total number of known portraits, 22. Each was 23 inches wide and 33 inches high, divided by a total of 25 pilasters, each 12 inches wide. That totals a wall 69.6 feet long; allowing for a side wall of 3 feet, its total width would be 75 feet. That, however, produces an awkward internal arrangement when moving out of this room into either of the corridors; it creates a huge lobby space and internal walls without a load-bearing function. There are, however, complications in the evidence; alterations in ink were made to the catalogue after printing by unknown hands and 22 portraits is a curious

¹⁰² Warriner, *A Prospect of Weston*, pp. 25-27.

¹⁰³ H. M. Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of Architects 1660-1840*, London 1996.

¹⁰⁴ Sale Catalogue 1781, p. 37.

¹⁰⁵ Album of measured drawings entitled *Select Examples of Elizabethan & Jacobean Architecture from Henry Shaw traced by A T Bolton*, A T Bolton, V&A Prints and Drawings, VOS/43 [RESTRICTED ACCESS].

¹⁰⁶ Cardinal Wolsey hangs in the National Portrait Gallery; Richard III, exhibited Christie's King Street, London May 30-1 June 2012, and Edward VI, Sotheby's Sale 1095, 5 July 2012, lot 195, have been claimed as part of this collection; Henry IV, Revere Auctions, St Paul, Minnesota, January 20, 2019; Henry VI, Henry VII at Eton College, United Kingdom. Others seen in the early years of the twentieth century are not now traceable: C. Daunt, *Portrait sets in Tudor and Jacobean England*, on-line PhD., University of Sussex, 2015, 2 vols, I, pp. 107-112, 134-141.

number to choose.¹⁰⁷ Nor do the eighteenth-century witnesses agree on who was portrayed. Should one entertain the possibility that originally there were at least 24 heads? If so, then the wall lengthens to 79 feet, very close to the length suggested for the central section of the east façade, 80 feet. It is also possible that there were still more heads, positioned above the side walls or that a portrait alternated with an empty niche.¹⁰⁸

But, though the decorative idiom is clearly of Elizabethan date and the room may preserve the footprint of an older house, it seems less likely that this was the original space in which the Elizabethan tapestries hung. Their full impact is achieved when they are viewed head-on, the panoramic effect diminished if the viewer stands surrounded by the countryside. It seems more probable that they hung in the corresponding space on the other side of the house, literally confronting anyone entering and explaining why, unusually, the Hall seems to be an empty, undivided space, lacking the screens which commonly divided an entrance passage from the hall proper. It had been designed to show off the four tapestry maps, their total length around 75-80 feet. The sequence would have been interrupted only by the fireplace whose stack is shown by Beighton so that they required a wall some 85 or 90 feet long, not an impossible lengthening of an internal wall of a unit whose external measurement was 80 feet.

Conclusions

By custom and fashion Elizabethan houses on the scale of Weston placed the grandest reception rooms on the upper floors, a convention which continued until the later seventeenth century. Later evidence however, even Wood's, does not fully illuminate the Elizabethan layout; nor does it suggest the practice was followed here. The Long Gallery beyond doubt was on the top floor east, the Hall two floors below. The auction catalogue suggests strongly that a large room, the seventeenth-century Dining Room (the later Great Drawing Room), occupied the ground floor's west side, above it an imposing chamber known by 1781 as The Library, possibly to be interpreted as Wood's 'room of state'. If the latter exhibited any grandeur it is odd that no later visitor offered any comment; possibly its Elizabethan fittings were long gone before they came, replaced by the shelving which held the 4000 or so books sold over four days. It is equally possible, however, that the room had never been finally fitted out.

There is a further oddity. Placing the stairs in turrets facing into the courtyard, an obvious space-saver which also aided circulation round the building, is a feature rarely found. Examples are known only from plans for a proposed extension of

¹⁰⁷ Turner, 'Glimpses of a gallery: the maps and 'paynted pictures' of Robert Hare', p. 112, notes that Hare's inventory lists seventeen English kings.

¹⁰⁸ For a discussion of possible extra items see Daunt, *Portrait sets in Tudor and Jacobean England*, on-line PhD., University of Sussex, i, pp. 134-141. The Sybils at Chastleton and the Bodleian frieze both left a blank between the figures.

Welbeck and, in circular towers, in an unsigned plan probably by Robert Smythson for an unknown house.¹⁰⁹

It is hard to trace the influence of any other known house on Ralph's structure. It is unlikely that Ralph drew up the plan himself, and nothing reveals that he consulted or enjoyed the specialized knowledge of a known architect. None is named in the accounts. It is, however, perhaps worth noting, without wishing to confer significance, that amongst Ralph's contacts were men who enjoyed the services of Robert Smythson (1534/5–1614); with Sir Francis Knollys at Caversham to whom there is a distant kinship link; with Sir Matthew Arundell at Wardour, an acquaintance, and with Sir Francis Willoughby at Wollaton which Sheldon certainly saw in March 1588 pretty well complete and far too late to have been able to borrow ideas.¹¹⁰ The evidence is far too fragile for any certainty.

More surprising are the similarities with the Old Library at the Bodleian, Oxford, added around 1614 to the already renovated Duke Humfrey's by Sir Thomas Bodley with whom Sheldon became acquainted. Its entrance, though into a double-storey Hall known as the Proscholium, was central. Two stair turrets, projecting into the courtyard as they did at Weston, then, and now, give access to the middle and top floors. Two further turrets in the two remaining corners of the quadrangle house 'a room facing the court', only accessible from inside the building – another feature found at Weston.¹¹¹

Finally, one might wonder why Ralph Sheldon, member of the gentry, built such a large house in a county removed from London social influences and at a time when his daughters, of marriageable age, were leaving home. The space he constructed, large enough to be a prodigy house in a county which had none, was far beyond what was needed for his personal occupation, as well as being far beyond his means. Is it possible he had hoped for a visit from the Queen and had, like others, rushed to erect a suitable dwelling?¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House*, fig. 112; anon fig. 107.

¹¹⁰ Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House*, pp. 40, 78, 86, 166; WCRO, CR 2632, fo.165.

¹¹¹ The Gough Room on the north stair; library offices on middle and upper floor; the present Upper Reading Room served as a Long Gallery for a long time and was embellished with a frieze of painted heads.

¹¹² His sister Anne Daston hosted the queen for a weekend in 1575 in a much smaller property – the manor house at Elmley Castle built in mid 1550s, Nichols, *Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, ed Goldring, ii, pp. 349 n.629, 358.

Appendix One: room names as listed in the auction catalogue

Day One

First lefthand garrett
Second lefthand garrett
Third lefthand garrett
Upper Bedchamber 2 pairs
Room on the Back Stairs
Green Worsted Damask Bed Chamber
On righthand side of the Long Gallery
Green Morine Bed chamber
On righthand side of the Long Gallery
First room on right hand from top of
Back Stairs
Second room on righthand from top of
Back Stairs
Third room on righthand from top of
Back Stairs
Fourth room or Nursery from top of
Back Stairs

Day Two

Righthand Garrett
Closet at top of Great Stairs
Bed Chamber backwards
Bed Chamber under, backwards
Bed Chamber below Chapel
Chintz Bed Chamber
Passage Room and Closet
Ante-Room adjoining
The Long Gallery

Day Three

The Closet and Passage
First Green Chamber
Second Green Chamber
The Print Parlour
The Blue Stripe Parlour
The Great Hall
The Great Staircase and Passage

Day Four

Small Blue Bed Chamber, Medicine
Closet and Passage
Middle Parlour or Music Room
Crimson Parlour
Crimson Bed Chamber
Gardener's Room
The Bed Chamber facing the court
The Maids Room on the Back Stairs

Day Five

The Passage Rom and Closet next the
Library
Small Blue Bed Chamber
The Library

Day Six

The Small Dressing Room

Tapestry Bed Chamber
Maids of Honour Bed Chamber
The King's Bed Chamber
The King's Dressing Room
Small Bed Chamber adjoining above

Day Seven

Butler's Pantry
Butler's Bedchamber
The Great Dining Room
Passage to the Servants' Hall and
Smoking Room
Little Smoking Room
Servants' Hall
Upper Larder
The Larder
Under Larder
Bread Room
Soap Room

Day Eight

Housekeeper's Room
Dining Parlour and Lobby
Late Mr Sheldon's Bed Chamber
And Dressing Room
Dressing Room
The New Kitchen
Scullery
Cook's Bedchamber
The Old Kitchen

Day Nine

Bake House
Mill House
Rooms over Bakehouse
Laundry
Wash House
Dairy
Cheese Room
Still Room
Brew House
The Garden, Woodyard etc
The Lower Wood Yard
The Lodge
Stables
Coach Horse Stable
Coach House
Carter's Room

Day Ten

The Long or Great Cellar
The Great Cellar
The Little Cellar
Cyder Cellar

Days 11-13

The Books

[Back to Contents >>](#)