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**On the Manor House of Wotton-under-Edge, and its Inhabitants**

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ON THE MANOR HOUSE  
OF WOTTON-UNDER-EDGE, AND ITS INHABITANTS.

By V. R. PERKINS.

THE Manor House of Wotton-under-Edge—one of the principal residences of the Berkeley family, and which was so intimately connected with the borough town of Wotton-under-Edge—was built by Thomas Lord Berkeley somewhere about the year 1210, or shortly before the end of the reign of King John. Smyth, in his life of this lord, tells us: He had built a faire house at Wotton, neere the church, or upon the place of the capital mesuage, where, before his death (A.D. 1243), hee often abode. <sup>1</sup>

In or about the first year of Henry III., 1215, he married Jone, daughter of Sir Ralph de Somery, Lord of Campden, in Gloucestershire, by whom, Smyth says, “he had issue that came to remarkableness in the world: six sons and two daughters.”<sup>2</sup> This lady survived her husband many years, and in this faire house, neere the church, she kept her residence most of the days of her widowhood, and thereupon was in common appellation called “*Domina de Wotton*,” and such was her affection for this manor that on the 2nd of August, in the 36th of Henry III., A.D. 1251, eight years after the death of her husband, she procured to herself for life, and after to the Lord Maurice her son and his heires, a grant of free warren within her Manors of Wotton and Cam, and a market to be holden every Friday at Wotton, and a faire every year to be there likewise holden upon the eve, the day, and the morrow of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, with all lybertyes and free customs which to a market and faire appertayne: and for the holding thereof out of her Manor of Wotton, which consisted of the six hamlets, Nibley, Sinwell, Wotton, Coombe, Wortley,

<sup>1</sup> Berkeley MSS. Lives of the Berkeleys, Maclean's edn., Vol. I. p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

and Bradley, selected the said hamlet of Wotton, whereof the whole manor had the name, and which, to this day, is called the Borough or Market town of Wotton, or the New Town, and the next year after agreed with the inhabitants of that hamlet of Wotton, by the name of her free burgesses of Wotton, that their burgages should consist of a third part of an acre, according to the custom and usages of Tetbury, and that every of them should have free entry of pasturage with a hors and a cowe into the three fields of the said manor after Michaelmas day, paying to her twelve pence yearly for every burgage, which deed of the Lady Jone, the Lord Maurice her son, by his deed dated on St. Matthew's day, in the 37th Henry III., confirmed for him and his heirs. And this was the time and this was the manner of the New Town's beginning and building where now it standeth the backer part whereof is still called the Old Town. The Old Town having, according to tradition, been burnt down in the reign of King John. These privileges were all confirmed by Thomas Lord Berkeley in the 10th year of Edward I., A.D. 1282.

This Lady Jone lived to a very advanced age, and died on the 22nd May, 1376, in the 4th year of Edward I. Maurice, her son and heir, died on St. Ambrose day, 4th April, 1281, from whom this manor descended to his son Thomas, the second lord of that name. He retained the Manors of Wotton and Symondsall, together with others in the county, in his own hands, and when he was free from foreign employments he went often in progress from one of his manor or farm houses to another, scarce two miles asunder, making his stay at each of them for one or two nights, overseeing and directing the husbandries, and so back to his standynge house where his wife and family remained, which was very great. Sometimes at Berkeley, sometimes at Wotton, sometimes at Bradley or elsewhere. He died in 1321, and was succeeded by his son Maurice, who, in the next year, joined with the Lords Gifford, Audeley and Mortimer in the rebellion against the King's favourites, the two Despensers. Being induced to go with others to Cirencester to meet the King, upon faith of safe conduct, he was treacherously seized and

and committed to prison in the Castle of Wallingford, and his Castle of Berkeley and his Manors of Wotton, Symondsall, and others are declared forfeited to the King, and given into the custody of Simon de Driby to hold at the King's pleasure; and by inquisition taken at Wotton on the 27th December, 1322, the jury found that it was more to the King's profit to keep these manors and lands stocked and stored with cattle as they then were than to let them out to farm for rent, so they remained in possession of the crown for some five or six years, until they were regained by his son Thomas, who having been in rebellion with his father against the Despensers, and also committed to prison was released from Pevensy, where he was then incarcerated by the success of the Queen's party in 1326, a few months after his father's death. And we find him soon after his release spending large sums of money in the repair of his houses and property, which had been allowed to go to ruin during the King's holding. This lord lived occasionally at his Wotton Manor House. He married, first, Margaret, daughter of Roger Mortimer, Earl of March, who died in 1337, and ten years later, Katherine, relict of Sir Peter le Veele, Knight, daughter of Sir John Clyvedon, who survived him some twenty-four years. This lady (as Lady Katherine Veele), founded the Free Grammar School at Wotton. This school is noted as being one of the oldest foundations of the kind in the kingdom. It dates back to 1385, 8th Richard II., when by letters patent this King granted his royal license to Katherine, Lady Berkeley, widow, to found and endow a Free Grammar School at Wotton-under-Edge, in the county of Gloucester, "to consist of a master and two poor scholars, collegiately to live together and to have perpetual succession, and also to endow the said school with certain real estates as therein mentioned." She appears to have died this same year, and was buried beside her husband in Berkeley Church.

The next one to take up occasional residence in this manor house was another Thomas Lord Berkeley, the fourth of that name. He was much more stylish and magnificent than any of his ancestors, and exceeded them all in the sumptuousness of his house, and the state in which he lived, and, if it were possible, he

was even more fond of field sports than any of them : he kept hounds and greyhounds, not only at all his mansions, but also at his granges and farm-houses, and he likewise had several stables of great horses both at Berkeley and Wotton. In 1367, when he was only fourteen years he married Margaret, daughter and heiress of Gerrard Warren Lord de Lisle, a young lady of seven summers, who brought him, on the death of her father, which took place in 1383, a great accession of property. Like his ancestors, he farmed his own demesne lands by the aid of reeves and bailiffs, and maintained great hospitality at the various manor houses, and gave handsome rewards to his servants as the following will testify.

In 21st Richard II. 1398. In recompense for his service, he gave to John Harsfield a messuage and divers lands and tenements in Bradley for his life.

In 1st Hen. IV. 1399. In recompense of his service, he gave to Robert Herblinge, and Alice his wife, for their lives, five houses in Wotton, and divers lands in the Manor of Wotton fforeign.

In 1402. In recompense of his service, he gave to John Chinham for his life, and Joan his wife, a messuage and divers lands in Chepinge lane in Wotton.

In 1414. In recompense of his service, he gave to Philip Chamberlain for his life, a messuage and divers lands in Wotton fforeign.

In 1417. Three months before his death he gave to John Plomer, and Jone his wife, for their lives, in recompense of her service, a house in Wotton, with liberty to buy and sell, toll free, within the said borough.

When the King's purveyor came to purvey in the Manor of Wotton he gave him secretly 3s. 4d. and his man 4d., to speak a good word to his master, saith the accompt, and for their friendship bestowed more on them in wine 12d.

This Lord and Lady Berkeley had only one child, a daughter, Elizabeth, who was about twenty-six years old at her father's

death. She was married to Richard Beauchamp, who, after his father's death, became Earl of Warwick and Regent of France.<sup>1</sup>

This marriage laid the foundation of the disputes and contentions for the possession of the Castle and Barony, with their fatal results, between this Elizabeth and her heirs, as heirs of line, and James Berkeley, nephew of the aforesaid Lord Thomas, whom he had brought up at Berkeley Castle as his heir, and the heirs of the said James as heirs at law. This is called the Great Berkeley Law Suit, and in its various incidents it lasted from the death of the Lord Thomas in 1417 to 1609, when it was finally settled by compromise. Though called a Law Suit it was, in its earlier stages, far in excess of proceedings at law, being marked by violence and bloodshed, which culminated in a pitched battle at Nibley Green, on 20th March, 1469, when the young Viscount Lisle was slain. Mr. Perkins gave a very interesting account of the struggle down to this date, but inasmuch as all the particulars have been fully related by the late Mr. J. H. Cooke, and printed in our Transactions, Vol. III., p. 305, it is unnecessary to repeat it.—ED.

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