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The Berkeleys at Yate

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THE BERKELEYS AT YATE.

By H. S. KENNEDY-SKIPTON.

WILLIAM, first Marquis of Berkeley, Earl of Nottingham, and Baron Berkeley (1426-91), called by old Smyth "William the Waste-all," occupied his vast property from 1463 to 1491.

He owned eighty-seven manors and forty-nine moieties and quarters of manors, among which we may note as very desirable properties, Dovercourt, Harwich, Bedford, Melton Mowbray, Repton, Ashborne, Brighton, Reigate, Dorking, Tyburn, Marylebone, &c. Much of this he got by his marriage with Anne, heiress of the Duke of Norfolk. He aided Richard III. with men, and Henry VII. with money, and played his part so well, that Richard's defeat at Bosworth did him no harm. As he had no issue, he left all his property to the Crown, as long as it should continue in the male line, and it was therefore enjoyed by Henry VII., Henry VIII., and Edward VI.

Hence his brother and his successors were for some time excluded from Berkeley Castle, and lived at Yate. The years of exile are 1491-1553. Maurice Berkeley, "The Lawyer," who succeeded to the title in 1491, and died in 1506, was the first of the Yate Berkeleys. This disinherited lord was shamefully treated by his worthless brother, but determined, old man though he was, to restore the fortunes of his house—

"Regium certe genus et Penates
Mœret iniquos."

He found so many flaws in his brother's sales of properties, and his bequest of manors to the Crown, that he recovered over fifty. Where part of one manor was situated within

another, the bequest of that other did not involve the part included, unless it was named, and therefore, as regards that part, his brother died intestate, and Maurice recovered it as his heir-at-law. To do Henry VII. justice, he did nothing to hinder these recoveries from the Crown, which shows he was not quite so grasping after all.

Smyth gives this picture of the poor old man:—

“With a milk-white head in his irksome old age of seventy years in winter terms and frosty seasons with a buckram bagge crammed with law cases in early mornings and late evenings walking with his eldest son between the Inns of Court and Westminster Hall following his lawsuits in his own old person.”

Maurice, Lord Berkeley, called “The Courtier,” succeeded his father in 1506, and died in 1523. He was always at Yate, when in England. Smyth describes him as “a real Gloucestershire man and a foreigner in all other counties,” a truly honourable designation.

He fought at Flodden, and married the daughter of Sir Marmaduke Constable, of Flamborough, who, as we learn from a brass plate in Flamborough Church, “at the age of three-score years and ten was present with his sonnes, brothers, servants, and Kynsmenne (*sic*) at Brankeston (Flodden), where the Kyng of Scottys was slain.” Sir Marmaduke lived in six reigns, and dying in 1515 was buried in Flamborough Church. The autograph letter which Henry VIII. wrote to him, to thank him for his services, is still preserved by R. W. Strickland-Constable, of Wassand, Hornsea.

He was a friend of Henry VIII. in his earlier and better days, ere he ravaged the Church, and began what is sometimes termed the Reformation.

When at home, his accounts were made up every week, and his household books with notes in his handwriting are still preserved at Berkeley Castle.

He left no issue, and his widow lived on at Yate after his death, and is buried in the Berkeley aisle of the church.

Thomas, Lord Berkeley, brother of the last, succeeded in 1523, and died in 1532. He is "The Sheepmaster."

When a younger son without great prospects he lived as a gentleman farmer, and was a great breeder of sheep, so that Smyth calls him "a perfect Cotswold sheppard," and tells us "he lived a kind of grazier's life having his flocks of sheep sommering in one place and wintering in another place, as he observed the fields and pastures to be found, and could bargain best cheape."

Through his sister-in-law's jointure and other expenses he did not get much from his brother's property at first, and lived with his brother-in-law, John Arnold, at Highnam for a time. He kept the accounts of his flocks most carefully, and usually got 12s. 8d. (=£9 now) a todd for his wool. He was knighted by his second cousin, the Earl of Surrey, for his services at Flodden. He lived in fine style at Yate, and married his two daughters there. Muriel married Sir G. Throckmorton, of Congleton, Warwickshire, and also of Lyppiatt Park, and the accounts of her wedding trousseau are preserved, her hose and shoes having cost 1s. 6d. A lady of small stature, she lived long, and saw 220 descendants before she died.

Thomas, Lord Berkeley, succeeded his father in 1532, and died in 1534. Existing documents at Berkeley show that he wrote the best hand, and was the best classical scholar of the family; but he could not live long at Yate, and so became a "paying guest" with the Countess of Wiltshire, at Stone, Dartford. He paid 25s. a week (=£16 now) for the keep of himself and wife, two gentlemen, and six men, and she did him well for the money. He died of a surfeit of cherries in 1534, leaving no visible heir.

Lady Anne, his widow, lived on at Yate, and proved herself one of the right sort. She had great trouble with her husband's brother, Maurice, who of course went for the title and estates, but found out to his sorrow that he was a little too previous. In fact he went far too fast at his fences, and just before the birth of Lord Berkeley's posthumous son,

a little stranger by no means welcome to his uncle, he attacked Yate Court at night, slew some deer, and was about to fire a rick at one corner of it, so as "to burn the lady with her weirish boy in it." There had been, however, some professional poachers after the deer that night, who on their appearance hid behind the rick, and hearing them talking flew out. This alarmed Maurice and his men, who fled. But the poachers informed Lady Anne, who got Maurice and his men convicted by the Star Chamber and fined. Really the poachers had an escape, for her ladyship was death on such vagabonds. She was a local magistrate, and had also judicial powers, and in some cases power of life and death, which she exercised against deer-stealers. When the Dean of Westbury-on-Severn objected to some of her servants playing tennis on Sunday morning at the church house at Yate, she denounced him to his face at Gloucester Sessions, and said she would "sit upon his skyrts." This curious phrase seems to have been the same as a threat of posterior propulsion nowadays. He with Sir N. Poyntz had already offended her by trying to get at her tame Roman priest, Wm. Norton, whom she had shielded from arrest. Evidently the Dean was a red-hot gospeller, with a nose for a heretic, *i.e.*, anyone not so ready as himself to adapt his religious principles to his interests. Her daughter, Elizabeth, was the greatest beauty of the courts of Edward VI. and Mary Tudor, and married Lord Ormonde.

Lady Anne looked after her household at Yate well, and every morning visited her stables, barns, dairies, and swine-troughs.

Henry, the first of that name, Lord Berkeley 1534—1613, was born nine weeks and four days after his father's death, so that his uncle was soon out of his misery. We may call him "Henry the Sportsman." He got his name Henry from his godfather, Henry VIII. Mary Tudor called on him to attend her with 500 men to check Wyatt's rebellion. So he borrowed money from his tenants, pawned his own and even the church plate, and thus got enough to raise and equip 500

stalwart Gloucestershire men. He was always moving about between Yate, Mangotsfield, Calluden, Berkeley, and London. It took him eight days to get from Berkeley to town, and he hunted and hawked as he went like Col. Thornton in his sporting tour to Scotland. He lodged at the houses of friends on these journeys, *e.g.*, Clifford; Sherborne, Saperton, Leckhampton, Compton Cassey, Frocester, Elmore, and Down Amney. The Duttons of Sherborne and the Guises of Elmore are descendants of Lord Berkeley's hosts. He married firstly Lady Catharine Howard, daughter of the Earl of Surrey, and as good a sportswoman as Gloucestershire has ever seen.

For the first sixteen years of their married life she accompanied her lord on all his hunting expeditions, but it was different after the execution of her brother, the Duke of Norfolk. She was a good shot with her crossbow at game, and with her longbow at a mark; and her bow, bracer, gloves, and arrows were long preserved at Berkeley. She was as keen on hawking as her husband, and even kept hawks in her bedroom to the detriment of her kirtles. In the steward's book we find some delicate details of the price of her wardrobe, when she went to the Twelfth Day festivities of Mary's Court at Greenwich. These may be multiplied by twelve to get the modern value. "Two pairs of fine hosen, 4s. 8d., and two fine smocks, 8s. A velvet hatt for my Lord, 3s."

Among the "boys," "whisperers," and broken-down sportsmen, who sponged on Lord Berkeley, were "captains, soldiers, poets, and cast courtiers." Hence we find him living beyond his income to the extent of £1,500 a year, so that in the end he had to sell property to the annual value of £1,500.

His New Year's gifts to the Queen were £10 in gold, as well as lamprey pies, salmon, and venison. He sent "other small tokens" to the judges, privy councillors, and court officials. To the Lord Keeper he gave ten old angels, which got him the commission of the peace, an honour one would

have expected to come to him gratis. James I. made him Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire, and he had only two deputies, Sir Richard Berkeley and William Dutton, of Sherborne.

He had 150 servants in orange tawny coats, with the lion rampant on the right sleeve. In winter they wore white frieze. Their salaries were as follows: Gentlemen, £3 6s. 8d. a year; yeomen, £2 13s. 4d.; and grooms, £2. Groom is not used in exactly the modern sense, but in the sense of men, *i.e.* serving men (Cf. Bride-groom).

Among these was one Langhan, an Irish footman. He once stopped his master's horses, when they ran away with his coach down Holborn Hill, London. Footman of course means running footman, and Langhan was a fine athlete, for he once went from Calluden, Warwickshire, to London on foot and back, 148 miles, and stayed the night in London,—all in forty-two hours. He was sent to fetch a special medicine for his mistress. This was a splendid performance, when we consider the state of the roads in the 16th century. His reward was a new suit of clothes. After Edward VI.'s death Lord Berkeley recovered his property, though he did not go to live at the Castle for some time. He had indeed often to retrench, and so went as a paying guest to stay with his mother-in-law, the Duchess of Norfolk, at Castle Rising, where he paid 10s. a week each for the keep of himself and his wife, and 4s. for each of her gentlewomen.

He was a good sportsman, and a "flyer" at every game. When in town he hunted in Gray's Inn Fields, and towards Islington and Highgate—a rather stiff country to negotiate nowadays. He also hunted the wild stag with his buck hounds in Leicestershire, Warwickshire, and Gloucestershire for thirty *summers*! He bought his hunters at fairs in the North, and they were of the best; while his hounds bred by himself were equally good. One of his best hunters was called "Brimsley."

Two of his favourite hawks, "Stella" and "Kate," were famous among falconers. There is an old Welsh proverb,

“You may know a gentleman by his hand, his hawk, and his greyhound,” and Lord Berkeley would have passed that test. His best falconers were Tooley and Guy Good, and so fond was he of his cooks, huntsmen, and falconers, that his steward had no power to dismiss these servants.

He got a red face through once hunting a deer on foot in the park at Yate and then dipping his heated face in hot water. “The flush and fulness of the nose, which forthwith arose, could never be remedied,” says old Smyth. As an excuse for a *portly* proboscis this is distinctly better than sunstroke.

Such then is the career of Henry, Lord Berkeley, who died in 1623. He was indeed a kind master, a devoted husband, a pious man, a great sportsman, and a truly noble lord. When he entertained his neighbours in his hall at Berkeley at Christmas and other festivals, he used to go round and welcome them at each table. When he had any guests of high rank, he took the lowest seat among them. He was a kind master, and was well served, and those, who knew him best, liked him best. “He lived an honest man without hurt to any, rendering to each man what was their right. None in his time was found more ready to render justice to all alike.” These are the words of one who knew him intimately, who had seen him on his knees in his oratory, and also in his pride of place leading the chase in his ancestral parks. We are not surprised to learn that his tenants wept over his grave at Berkeley declaring with one consent that they had lost the best landlord in England, and his old steward, to whom he had left his silver watch, burst into tears. Generous forgiving and dignified in all his relations the great head of the greatest house in Gloucestershire bore himself well, and we may say of him in the words of Chaucer—

“He never yit no vileinye ne sayde
In al his lyf unto no maner wight;
He was a verray perfight gentil knight.”