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William de Syde

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WILLIAM DE SYDE

Some references by John Smyth give a few glimpses of a predecessor of his as Steward of the Berkeley estates three centuries before him.¹

Syde, from which he takes his name is a charmingly situated hamlet near Elkstone, with a population now reduced apparently to less than thirty: the church, one of the less notable ones of a notable group in this area, has features dating back to the Norman period, and one of the quaint saddle-back towers.

Mentions of William occur from 1334 to 1350. He was steward to Thomas III lord Berkeley: as his lord was absent much of the time in the Scottish and the French wars with his king, the steward had increased responsibilities and powers, which he had to share with some others on occasion: he acted also for his lord's brother Maurice. Transactions recorded of him, like the foundation of the chantry in Wortley chapel, were really in the name of his lord. He alone seems to have been 'Receivour.'

He was 'parson of Awre beside,' presumably a way of increasing his emolument without expense. Apparently he, without his colleagues, had the nomination of the priests serving the many chantries which lord Thomas founded. He was one of the two god-fathers to Thomas' third son; and the eldest son was placed under his tuition, with control of the properties given in place of pocket money or allowance.

Smyth's last mention, in 1350, records how lord Thomas, 'rewarding the merits of his chiefest officers,' gave William de Cheltenham £10 16s 4d for life, and rents of lands to a much greater amount, and the wardship of an heir with profit of his manor during his minority, and a manor estimated at not less than £250 p.a. 'The like liberality he reached to William de Syde his Receivour, parson of Awre, whom I hold for the honestest man: for no sooner was he dead but seventeen petitions were preferred to this lord against him which yet remain in parchment in Berkeley Castle.'

¹ See index to vol. I of the *History of the Berkeleys*.

This last remark is a useful commentary on the criticisms of John Smyth's honesty which are sometimes now heard: his purchase of an estate in Nibley is quoted, and the allegations about his trusteeship for Wotton Grammar School which led to his long libel action. It is forgotten that standards of honesty have risen, and that even now they vary according to the person and the country.

I have sometimes wondered whether the probity for which Sir Mathew Hale was renowned would be as remarkable now: he was able to invest freely in manors. Forty years ago in Russia I heard that it was not only the emoluments of an official post which a candidate would consider, but also what I translated as 'not dishonourable bribes.' India has its common talk of judges who honestly take bribes from both sides and then decide the case on its merits. In a household of decent Indian servants, it was safe to leave loose cash about, though they would exact a percentage on the marketing, share some household goods, and perhaps block the entry of anyone who would not give a customary *douceur*.

To judge a man one must know and remember the standard of his time and place and class.

E. S. LINDLEY.

CHANDOS JUSTICE

In the 'History of Wortley'¹ an incident was reported in which three well-to-do brothers, land-owners and clothiers, were in 1595 robbed of no less than £400 on the highway. While completing the History, further information was found which made the incident of doubtful credit to the Bridges family of Lord Chandos. Still more information has since come to light which completes a pretty picture of one aspect of the times.²

The culprits were of the entourage of the first Lord Chandos, and one of them was an illegitimate son of his second son

¹ *B. & G. Trans.*, LXVIII, p. 65.

² *B. & G. Trans.*, LXIX, p. 188.