

Biography & Epitaph of William Sheldon c.1500 – 1570

Early Years

William Sheldon's date of birth is not known, but was probably around 1500. He was the eldest of ten children born to Ralph Sheldon and Philippa (née Heath); nothing is known of his life before his possible admission to the Middle Temple.¹ In 1528 he removed to the Inner Temple and he remained active in its affairs until the 1540s, serving, or if it inconvenienced him, refusing to serve, as steward for Christmas at various dates.²² But whether he participated willingly in community duties or purchased an expensive escape, his presence amongst the members of the Inns of Court brought him into contact with many men far above his own social standing. It is probably to their judgement of his capabilities that he owed his rapid advance into positions of authority within the county administrative structure.



Mary Willington,
©Hilary L. Turner

Possibly as early as 1526 he married Mary, fourth daughter of William Willington of Barcheston Warwickshire, Merchant of the Staple, amongst the largest sheep farmers in south Warwickshire with his own premises at Calais and an office in London.³³ The marriage brought advantages to each side, providing Willington with legal advice and assistance while linking the as yet relatively unimportant Sheldon, through the marriages of his new sisters in law, with the most prominent families in the area, Catesby, Cave, Grevile, Holte, Middlemore and Mountford. In 1532 Sheldon bought 300 acres of land at Weston in Long Compton, Warwickshire, for which according to his father's will he provided the

¹ This account draws on E.A.B. Barnard, *The Sheldons*, Cambridge 1936 which is superseded by the far more accurate biography of Sheldon in *Members of the House of Commons, 1509-1558*, HMSO 1982, ed. S.T. Bindoff, p.308 and S.L. Adams, "'Because I am of that Countrey and Mynde to Plante Myself There'" Robert Dudley and the West Midlands', *Midland History*, 20, 1995, pp. 21-74, (Adams 1995). Bindoff's identification of Sheldon with a W Shelton admitted sometime between 1524 and 1551 does not seem to this author to be very certain; spelling of the name with T and D are not otherwise known to be interchangeable – except in Library of Congress cataloguing - but an influential Shelton family lived in East Anglia. Revision of his date of birth to 1511 in Bindoff *op.cit.* ignores the fact that his firstchild, Anne, was married in 1546. If she were then 18, William's marriage must have taken place around 1525-26, when he would surely have been older than 15.

² F.A. Inderwick, *A Calendar of Inner Temple Records*, 1896, 3 vols., 92, 123, 172, 132, 137, 168, 214, 219, 220.

³ As appears in his will, TNA PROB 11/42B/642, Willington's daughters married, Margery = (1) Thomas Holte of Aston, (2) Sir Ambrose Cave; Godith = Basil Feilding of Newnham; Elizabeth = Edward Boughton of Lawford; Mary = William Sheldon; Margaret = Sir Edward Greville of Milcote; Anne = Francis Mountford of Kingshurst; Katherine = (1) Richard Kempe (2) William Catesby of Chastleton (3) Sir Anthony Throckmorton. The bargaining attendant on the settlement before Katherine married William, son of Sir Richard Catesby, shows how hard won was Willington's social standing, despite his wealth, Oxfordshire History Centre, E/24/1/1D/3.

money; William later received licence to empark the land.⁴ Willington's will shows that at least one financial arrangement concerned with land purchase, possibly part of the marriage settlement, was entered into with Sheldon's father on his son's behalf.⁵

The family had links to Pershore abbey; at the time when its dissolution was imminent a conversation between William's father, Ralph (d.1546), and the abbot was reported to king Henry VIII's secretary of state, Thomas Cromwell.⁶ By the mid-1540s William, like many others, took the opportunity to increase his property by purchasing lands and goods from the dissolved monasteries, Pershore amongst them.⁷

But not all his acquisitions lay so close by; many were not later listed in his will, so presumably a number of them were sold on to realise a quick profit.⁸ Neither were all bought only in his name; his brother Francis and his father in law joined with him in some transactions. Expenditure totalled £5472.

William's Career

William was first appointed as a JP in Worcestershire in 1531 and remained in post through the decade;⁹ his career took a big step forward when, in 1542, he was elected to the House of Commons as MP for Worcestershire, the first of four occasions.¹⁰

Payment to him as solicitor to Queen Katherine Parr, acting in the matter of her jointure,¹¹ is recorded in 1543-44; his connection to her household may have come

⁴ Quoted in Michael Warriner, *A Prospect of Weston in Warwickshire*, Kineton, 1978, p.7-8, Warwickshire Record Office (WaCRO) CR 456 box 22,23; he paid £ 573 6.8d. His father's will, however (TNA PROB 11/31/403), notes that he had bought the manor for his son. Licence to empark was granted in 1545, *Letters & Papers Henry VIII*, 1545, ii, 846 (34).

⁵ TNA, PROB 11/42B/642; *L & P Henry VIII*, 1545, I, 628; *L & P Addenda 1509-47*, 1711.

⁶ *L & P Henry VIII*, 1533, no. 298, pp. 129-131; TNA C 1/893/11.

⁷ *L & P Henry VIII*, 1538, ii, 666 where William's father, Ralph, is said to have purchased 'stuff' from Bordesley; incorrect reference to BLib. Add Ms 17041. Mythology has it that vestments now at Downside were rescued from Bordesley by the Sheldons, J.Humphreys, 'Redditch Vestments at Downside Abbey', *Trans. Birmingham Arch. Soc.*, vol. 53, 1928, p.205. Some manuscripts, now in the Bodleian Library, are also rumoured locally to be former Sheldon property, presented to the Bodleian by Ralph Sheldon, but this is unsubstantiated by the evidence, N.R.Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, London 1964, p.11. Surviving manuscripts from the Abbey are Bodleian Library, Bodl 168 presented by William Willowbye in 1615 and Laud Misc 606, acquired from Archbishop Laud, previously owned by Thomas Peinton; the third is British Library Add Ms 37787. Further information has been collected by Lorna Watts in (eds). S.M.Hirst and S.M.Wright, *Second report on excavations at Bordesley Abbey, Redditch*, BAR British Series 111, 1983.

⁸ *L & P Henry VIII*, 1544, Jan. g 80(50); Feb. g 141 (12); Nov. ii, g 340(9); g.340 (57); *Ibid.*, Aug. 1545 g.266 (7); *Ibid.*, 1546, g.302 no.65. Sheldon's will, 1570, TNA, PROB 11/53/79.

⁹ *L & P Henry VIII*, vol. 5, 1531-32 no. 1694 1533, p. 706; vol. 12(1), 1537, no. 539(3), p. 250; vol. 13(1), 1538, no. 384 (21), p. 133; vol. 14(1) 1539, no. 1354 (2), p. 584; vol. 16, 1540, no. 107(4), p.51; vol. 17, 1542, no. 362 (67), p. 216.

¹⁰ TNA, C 219/18B/108.

¹¹ TNA, E 315/161/38; E 101/423/15, fo.8.

through acquaintance with Sir Anthony Bouchier, then in the Queen's service, to whom Sheldon wrote, in 1545, acknowledging the many kindnesses received in the past year and asking Bouchier's interest to assist him to obtain the reversion of a manor then the Queen's property. Subsequently he had to request Bouchier's forbearance in the matter of payment; the two were clearly on friendly terms for no difficulties were raised. In the same letter Sheldon, excusing his own absence, mentions having arranged a house in Pershore for Bouchier's use and presumably also for his retinue, perhaps to hold a court.¹² A year afterwards, 1547, when Sheldon was first appointed sheriff of Worcestershire, he seems also to have been in the service of Thomas Seymour, brother of Protector Somerset, as the steward of one of his properties.¹³ As early as 1548, he may have been forging links with John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland as early as 1548,¹⁴ and, by then in possession of the family estate of Beoley, Worcestershire, following the death of his father in 1546, have been engaging in the cautious game of second-guessing power politics. His own connections too may have furthered his career; his relative by marriage Nicholas Heath, had been appointed bishop of Rochester in 1542 and would accept Worcester in 1543; deprived of office between 1551 and 1554 he was translated to York in 1555 when he also became Lord Chancellor. Only in 1559, following the accession of Queen Elizabeth, did he finally lose all influence; he died in October 1565.¹⁵

In February 1546 William was amongst the commissioners appointed to survey chantry lands in Staffordshire, Shropshire and Shrewsbury, and was subsequently pricked as sheriff from November 1547-48; he was again elected MP for Worcestershire in 1547.¹⁶ In May the same year he accepted a post in the second Court of Augmentations as receiver for the revenues of monastery lands sold in the counties of Northampton, Warwick, Leicester, Rutland, Stafford, Shrewsbury, Hereford and Worcester, in the two latter cities and Coventry. It was a heavy commitment which he executed in tandem with his duties as commissioner of chantries.¹⁷

¹² *L&P Henry VIII*, 1545, no.628; *Calendar of State Papers Domestic Addenda* 1509-1547, no.1711 (in future *CSPD*).

¹³ Osborn Collection, Yale Univ Lib 71.6.41, quoted Bindoff, *House of Commons*.

¹⁴ Adams 1995, 44, n.95.

¹⁵ S. T. Bindoff, *op. cit.* Heath was deprived of Worcester between 1551 and 1554, and was the prisoner-guest of the bishop of London, 1551-53. In his capacity as Lord Chancellor he announced the death of Mary and the accession of Elizabeth to Parliament, Norman Lloyd Williams, *Tudor London Visited*, 54, 1992, Cassell, London. For his portrait, see Roy Strong, *The English Icon*, 1969, p.104, National Portrait Gallery, London.

¹⁶ Surveyor of chantries, *L&P Henry VIII*, 1546, ii, g.302 (30); sheriff, *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1547-53 Addenda* p.317 (in future *CPR*); as MP, Hatfield 207.

¹⁷ Augmentations appointment, *CPR 1554-55*, p.76-77; payments as collector of taxes, *CSPD Addenda 1547-53*, p.357 and *CSPD 1547-53* nos 816, 838; of pensions and corrodies *CSPD 1601-03, Addenda*

By the start of Mary's reign he was in a position to decline the knighthood offered on the occasion of the Queen's marriage; his excuse was on the unlikely, but acceptable, grounds of poverty. Although his father in law had to pay £30 to avoid the honour, William seems to have escaped making any payment.¹⁸ He sold his office in the Court of Augmentations to his son in law Savage. Nevertheless he took the precaution of suing for a general pardon for any offences unwittingly committed in the previous reign in November 1553, as he did again in 1558.¹⁹ He served again as MP for Worcestershire in 1554 and 1555, and as sheriff in 1556; he seems also to have been employed in the Exchequer after the dissolution of the Court of Augmentations, and was certainly active in the county as a collector of taxes and of 'free gifts'.²⁰ His associates include Sir William Raynsford of Great Tew, an enthusiastic purchaser of monastic lands in Oxfordshire; Sir John Williams of Thame, Oxfordshire, treasurer of the Court of Augmentations, and Sir John Pollard who, with Williams, oversaw the hand-over of Reading Abbey. Pollard became an MP; Sheldon married his second daughter to Pollard's younger brother, Anthony.²¹ His other daughters Anne, Catherine and Godith married, respectively, Francis Savage of Elmley Castle, Edmund Plowden the jurist of Bishop's Castle, Shropshire and Brayn, a Bristol merchant.²² Their mother died in January 1553.²³

It must have been very soon after the accession of Queen Elizabeth, however, with a shrewd eye to his own and his family's interests, that William attached himself to the rising star of Robert Dudley, the future earl of Leicester. It is a jump that may not have been too difficult to achieve in view of the connections of his second wife. On 1 November 1555 he married again, to Margaret, daughter of Richard Brooke, chief justice of the Exchequer (d.1529) and widow of Sir William Whorwood, Henry VIII's Attorney-General from 1540-45.²⁴ Margaret had previous connections to John Dudley who acquired the wardship of her older daughter, later first wife of his son

1547-65, p.409, payments of monastic pensions; in March 1555 he sold the post in the Augmentations office to his son in law Francis Savage, *CPR 1554-55*, p.76, 262. On Francis' death William acquired wardship of his son, *CPR 1557-58*, p.69. Commissioner of chantries 1548, *CPR 1547-49*, p.137.

¹⁸ John R. Dasent (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council*, NS vol 5, 1892, 1554-55, 50; E.P. Shirley, 'Composition to avoid Knighthood 1 & 2 Mary', *Herald and Genealogist*, V, 1870, 18-24.

¹⁹ *CPR 1553-54*, p. 457; *CPR 1558-60*, p. 176.

²⁰ As MP Bindoff but no note; as sheriff, BLib Harleian 1043, f.52-3; *CSPD Mary*, HMSO 1998, nos656 & 682; as collector of 'loans' lent on privy seals, *CSPD 1547-80*, p. 116.

²¹ Bindoff, *op.cit.*

²² Inscription, William's tomb at Beoley, Barnard, *The Sheldons*, p. 26.

²³ See the epitaph below.

²⁴ The marriage took place at Putney, Margaret's residence, TNA WARD 7/13/135 together with the settlement. Birmingham Archives and Heritage (BAH), Barnard Miscellany 77/ D/1 and 77/Q/1, quoting deeds now lost from Coughton Court, dated 30.11.1555.

Ambrose, older brother of Robert, which may have eased Sheldon's contacts there; her younger daughter by Whorwood subsequently married into the Throckmorton family of Coughton Court.²⁵ Correspondence with Robert Dudley on matters concerning the lord lieutenancy of Worcestershire, where William was the acting deputy, was in progress by 1559. His eldest son, Ralph, was an intermediary in the sale of the constabship of Warwick castle which Dudley sought to acquire from its holder, Sir Robert Throckmorton of Coughton, Ralph's father in law.²⁶ William subsequently provided a surveyor for the lands at Dry Marston the earl wished to sell and later acted collected the monies.²⁷ He served on a commission to survey the lands of the bishopric,²⁸ a post he might have obtained through the offices of his brother-in-law, Sir Ambrose Cave, one of Queen Elizabeth's earliest Councillors,²⁹ and was *Custos Rotulorum* [Keeper of the Rolls] for Worcestershire from at least 1562 until his death; as holder of that office he was described by bishop Sandys of Worcester as being 'indifferent' in religion.³⁰ He was sheriff once more, in 1567.³¹

William was still to acquire at least two and possibly three other properties, raising the money presumably by the sale of his ex-monastery lands though traces of these transactions are few.³² Skilts he purchased in 1560,³³ Brailes, some part of which he already owned by inheritance, he acquired in 1556.³⁴ Following lengthy wrangling over the will of his father in law, he acquired Barcheston by purchase, not, as is so often said, as part of the dowry of his first wife, Mary Willington.³⁵ Because the acquisition of Barcheston has a bearing on the organization of the tapestry venture, the quarrel will be examined in some detail.

²⁵ Bindoff, *op.cit.*, sv Whorwood.

²⁶ Adams 1995, 37, 47 & n.223.

²⁷ BAH, Ms 3061/Acc 1901-003, 357601 and 357602.

²⁸ CPR 1558-60, p.422.

²⁹ Bindoff, *op.cit.*, sv Cave.

³⁰ CPR 1560-63, p.444; M. Bateson, ed. 'A Collection of Original Letters from the Bishops to the Privy Council, 1564', *Camden Miscellany IX*, Camden Society NS liii, 1895.

³¹ BLib Harleian 1043, f.52-3.

³² One of these is the sale of Talton in Tredington around 1545, Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service, 899:749/8782/65. Several sales were of tithes or advowsons rather than land, see <https://ralphsheldon1537-1613.info> for details, Chapter Ten.

³³ Skilts, CPR 1558-60, 1 April 1560, p.370; Geoffrey Tyack, *Warwickshire Country Houses*, 1994, p.264.

³⁴ Brailes, CPR 1549-51, p.199; Exemplification of 1586 in Birmingham Central Library, BAH, deeds 168208; Hilary L. Turner, 'An early map of Brailes: Fit Symbolographie?' *Warwickshire History*, xi no.5, Summer 2001, 182-193.

³⁵ Nor was it bequeathed to him by William Barnes; his will is recited in TNA C 142/132/37.

Acquisition of Barcheston

Sheldon's father in law, William Willington, died in May 1555; other than the small bequests to relatives, servants and the poor many of the testamentary dispositions for his seven daughters were governed by agreements made years before, in some cases probably forming part of the marriage settlements.³⁶ His nephew on his second wife's side, William Barnes, inherited tenements in Brailes and Chelmscote and the lease of Wyncote, Ditchford Frary and Tyso; he was expected to pay the bequests to the poor. Four of Willington's sons-in-law with Barnes were named as executors;³⁷ his Overseer was Sir Richard Brooke, chief justice of the Common Pleas from c.1554. The will's terms were immediately challenged.

The dispute began within days of Willington's death when his sons in law successfully sought letters *ad colligendum* which would allow them to remove Barnes as an executor and in effect minimize his share in the will's provisions.³⁸ Barnes' relatives, in particular the widow's son from her first marriage, accused Sheldon of falsifying the will and of having presented an alternative document to Willington, who was said to be nearly blind, to sign.³⁹ There was also considerable quibbling about the exact responsibility for distribution of the smaller legacies – to the poor – and about Willington's personal estate. The widow's relatives accused her husband's family, Sheldon amongst them, of overstaying their welcome after the funeral, of consuming provisions in the house which were rightfully the widow's property and of stealing money from her. They failed to mention that Anne Willington had herself removed £100 from the house before probate, an action which Sheldon claimed should invalidate the other provisions made for her. The case, in Chancery, was heard before the Lord Chancellor who by then was Nicholas Heath, Sheldon's relative by marriage. Judgment was given against Barnes who, having first agreed to certain articles and then reneged, spent 18 weeks in the Fleet prison. The outcome of the Chancery case is not specifically known, but its success is implied because the will was finally proved, though by only one of the executors, Basil Fielding, on 14 November 1559.

³⁶ Willington's will TNA, PROB 11/42B/642

³⁷ Ambrose Cave, Edward Grevill, Basil Fielding and William Sheldon were named; Francis Mountford, Anthony Throckmorton and Edward Boughton were omitted.

³⁸ TNA, C 3/122/71.

³⁹ Falsification might have been difficult given knowledge of the earlier settlements, WaCRO CR 580 9/38; 14/1-5, 9. No false version has been found. A century later the will was quoted again, in connection with charity lands at Brailes, TNA, C 93/30/28 as also E 41/347, both as the proved version.

A second focus of discontent was Barnes' attempt to appropriate wool shorn from sheep to which he claimed he had a right in defiance of the letters *ad colligendum* which conferred authority on the other executors to supervise all Barnes' actions. Caught red-handed by the apparently chance appearance of Sheldon riding from Weston, a fight ensued close to Barcheston. Subsequent court procedures followed in Star Chamber.⁴⁰

Given that in addition to his extensive lands Willington was said to possess more than £3000 in money and that a further £2000 was owed him in debts it is perhaps scarcely surprising that the son in law who had expected a different and perhaps more valuable inheritance should be, or should be thought to be, making trouble. There may even be some truth in this. In the will Sheldon received Combe Baskerville purchased jointly with his father in law. It was specifically stated that Sheldon had been content to forgo, and had even signed documents cancelling, all the previous arrangements – one of which had given him Barcheston. His consent had perhaps been more diplomatic than real. On the excuse of a covenant not performed Sheldon entered upon the manor of Barcheston in April 1555, even before Willington's death.⁴¹

An Inspeximus of 1572 gives us some of the details which led to the disputing parties' acceptance of an award in 1564 whereby William Sheldon agreed to pay £3000 for the manor of Barcheston.⁴² It rehearsed inquiries made of deponents in the Exchequer Court substantiated and illuminated by a long series of documents quoted and by four much damaged sheets listing the documents handed over to Sheldon after he had made payment.⁴³ It was recalled that the source of the quarrel had originated in 'the year of the great commotion in the north', ie the Pilgrimage of Grace (1536). A deed made at that time because Sheldon was 'much in the counsell of Willington and of his confidence', shows that Willington had given Sheldon possession of Barcheston and then upset the arrangement, subsequently conferring the manor on his second wife for life and then to Barnes.⁴⁴ One witness declared that the first Mistress Willington, 'being sick of her breste' had on her deathbed told him that she had made every effort to ensure that Mary her daughter, Sheldon's wife, should have Barcheston even though

⁴⁰ TNA, STAC 2/24/259; STAC 4/4/58; STAC 4/6/7.

⁴¹ WaCRO CR 580/21(2), Stockton Fortescue deeds summarized on The National Archives Discovery Catalogue, Gist of Barcheston CR 580.

⁴² WaCRO CR 580/17/5.

⁴³ WaCRO CR 580/15, 16.

⁴⁴ WaCRO CR 580/13 and 580/9/38, 14/2.

Willington might re-marry. Another swore that he had been at Barcheston when the news of the transfer to Barnes had leaked out and had run to Weston and told Mary ‘whereupon she wept that her mother in law (ie the second Mistress Willington) should have it for she believed it had been given to her by her father’. Yet another stated that at Willington’s funeral he had heard Sheldon roundly abuse a third party for letting the cat out of the bag, accusing the latter of mentioning the deeds which were to give him Barcheston when it would have been better to keep silent.

A number of alterations to the will came about because of Sheldon’s determined pursuit of legal action at Westminster against his brother in law.⁴⁵ Barnes yielded possession of the manor after Mistress Anne’s death first to another executor and then to John Throckmorton, son of Catherine née Willington.⁴⁶ Barnes’ death in 1561 decreased, but did not immediately remove continued dissension.⁴⁷ By 1563 the parties had come together and had agreed to arbitration. The quarrel was resolved largely within the family, for the arbitrators had all been friends and the executors who appointed them relatives of Willington. The outcome was that Throckmorton was to receive £3000 from Sheldon in return for granting Sheldon outright possession.

Sheldon had other grievances, launching a separate suit against his brother in law Basil Fielding concerned with lands along the small Kneebrook stream at Ditchford Frary, and Middle (now Lower) and Upper Ditchford. William owned land nearby in an uneasy partnership with Willington. He now claimed his share thus challenging the bequest to Fielding under the terms of an earlier lease.⁴⁸

None of these cases puts Sheldon in a very good light, and there are other instances when he defended his interests tooth and nail. In 1547 he sued Sir Thomas Smyth over possession of Combe Grange, Westington near Chipping Campden, a quarrel resolved by the heirs.⁴⁹ Sheldon maintained that he had purchased it amongst other lands formerly the possession of Bordesley abbey, Smyth claimed it as his and alleged that Sheldon, ‘a man of great possessions, substance, power and office in the country thereabouts’ had cut down the trees and grubbed up the roots. Sheldon tried to

⁴⁵ A complete record of the cases appears in TNA C78/14/36 and C78/33/30 (Dichford Frary), C78/36/27 (disputed will) and C78/39/15 (Chelmscote), now available on www.Anglo-American Legal Tradition (AALT).

⁴⁶ WaCRO CR 580/14/6, 8, 9, 11, resulting from ‘the articles’ mentioned in TNA C 3/122/71.

⁴⁷ Barnes died 12 May 1561, Tredington parish registers, originals at WaCRO, transcribed M.F. Brittain, *Birmingham and Midlands Society for Heraldry and Genealogy*, n.d.

⁴⁸ TNA C78/36/ 27, C78/33/ 30, now available on AALT.

⁴⁹ TNA, STAC 3/1/103, STAC 3/4/32, STAC 3/32/150.

get the case heard in the Court of the Marches but, failing in that, claimed that a former abbot had leased the lands to his father 'a long time before the dissolution'. Slightly later William's sister Mary, sent to a relative, got herself with child and then married the father, a man far below her in rank; her guardian, Dame Philippa Knightley, was sued for neglecting Mary's proper care.⁵⁰

His Achievement

Although William died on December 23 1570, his funeral did not take place until 15 January, headed as a mark of respect by the Herald Sir Robert Cooke, Clarenceux King of Arms, the man who had granted William the right to bear a coat of arms. The death certificate is held still by the College of Arms in London, signed by the herald, Ralph and the executors. Functioning now as a mini-genealogy; it notes William's two wives, his descendants and Ralph's children.⁵¹ The inquisition into his properties was held in March; nothing was disputed.⁵² Few details illuminate Sheldon's personal life; we know he had a portrait painted of his eldest son Ralph in the early 1560s, possibly by Stephen van der Meulan;⁵³ that there was a burglary at Weston by one of his own tenants;⁵⁴ that he left a legacy of £4 to each of his musicians and stipulated that his tapestries were to remain at Beoley 'from heyre to heyre'.⁵⁵ His revenues did not only come from rents; from his father he had inherited coal mines at Cole Orton Leicestershire, which he exploited with the earl of Huntingdon;⁵⁶ he owned salt bullaries at Droitwich.⁵⁷ A third venture, intended to introduce new skills to the surrounding countryside, was launched in the plans to introduce tapestry and cloth weaving at Barcheston.⁵⁸ The degree to which it also benefited the family, and its ultimate success, is unknown.

⁵⁰ TNA, STAC 2/20/94 and STAC 2/25/197.

⁵¹ College of Arms, London, MS Vincent 90, f. 209, a plain unornamented document, probably the draft; Nash, *Collections*, records an illuminated original, now lost. A misreading has also given rise to the incorrect information that Ralph had a second son, William. It is actually his brother who was referred to, aged 27.

⁵² TNA C 142/159/87, torn, dirty and faded, more easily read in TNA WARD 7/13/135.

⁵³ Private Information.

⁵⁴ TNA, C66/1016.

⁵⁵ TNA, PROB 11/53/79; WARD 7/13/135.

⁵⁶ The mines at Cole Orton had been developed by William's father TNA, C 1/892/23; others were at Bedworth TNA, E 133/10/1663 and LR 13/30/7.

⁵⁷ The bullaries were at Droitwich, Birmingham Archives, Ms 3061/Acc 1901-003 167742, 167884, 167456, 167800. Licence to sell others, also at Droitwich, was granted in 1566, *CPR 1563-66*, p.361.

⁵⁸ Hilary L. Turner 'Finding the Sheldon Weavers: Richard Hyckes and the Barcheston tapestry works reconsidered', *Textile History*, 33 no 2, Autumn 2002, 133-161.

'Tapestries once at Chastleton House and their influence on the image of the tapestries called Sheldon: a re-assessment', *Antiquaries Journal*, 88 2008, 313-43.

Epitaph to William Sheldon at Beoley

Translated by E A B Barnard

To William Sheldon, son of Ralph Sheldon and Philippa Heath: He inherited a great fortune from his parents and not by the opportunities of any public office, or by any fawning on a prince but by his well-known and honourable prudence he greatly increased it.

A MAN BORN TO AID THE PUBLIC GOOD

So patriotic that he was the first in England to commence the Art of Tapestry Weaving for which at his own expense he provided large sums of money, and left by will property and money to care for the workmen in that craft. Towards his neighbours, by his very influence he settled their quarrels as they arose, and between discordant people by his very love he established peace; many of his servants, as also not a few of his friends, he raised to ample fortunes. In his will he greatly and openheartedly benefited his relations as well as others. To his children (of whom Mary the daughter and co-heir of William Willington of Barcheston bore to him six in number, and dying on 25 January 1553, commended them to his care) he presented his sons Ralph and William with ample patrimonies, and to his daughters goodly dowries – Anna married Francis Savage of Elmlye in the County of Worcester, Philippa to Anton Pollard of Newnham in the County of Oxford, Catharine to Edmund Plowden in the County of Shropshire, Gooditha to Robert Brayn of Bristol – and he left them all in peace and concord. To his fellow creatures his own house, with all his goods, was as a hospitable inn, ever at their service.

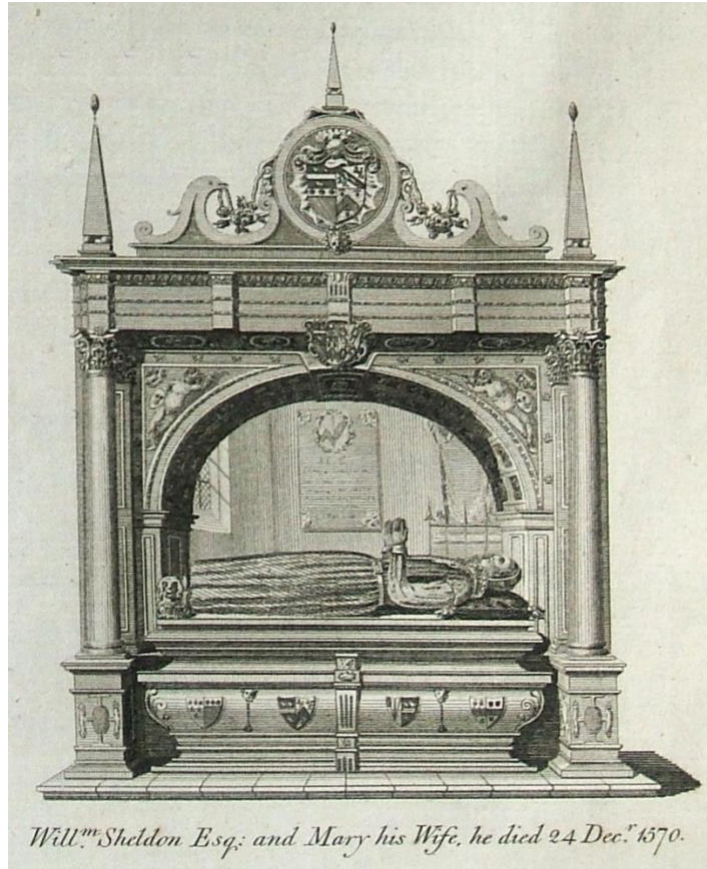
On December 25 1570 he departed this life.

As an example of true virtue he was greatly missed; no less by his friends in the county as well as by his children, his relatives and his servants.

Ralph his son erected this monument

William's tomb from Nash's *History of Worcestershire*

©Hilary L Turner



© Hilary L Turner; first published on <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info> in 2009, revised 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2020, 2025. Hilary L Turner is hereby identified as author of this work in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright Designs and Patents Act of 1988

[Back to Contents >>](#)