

The Bromes of Holton Hall: A Forgotten Recusant Family

By JOHN FOX

SUMMARY

The Bromes came to Holton from Baddesley Clinton Hall, Warwickshire, c. 1430. In the mid 16th century the owners of both houses married sisters of Lord Edward Windsor, a Court favourite. The Brome line at Baddesley Clinton was by then the Ferrers line, and in reduced circumstances. They became financially dependent on the Windsors and the Holton Bromes for the whole of Elizabeth's reign, and the Windsor connection placed both families on the national scene. Holton lay on the Worcester road, between London and Baddesley Clinton, and relatives, possibly even fugitives – Baddesley Clinton was a Jesuit safe-house 1587-91 – knew Holton and its sympathies. Bromes were imprisoned in the Tower for recusancy, implicated in the Babington conspiracy to replace Elizabeth with Mary of Scots, and accused of sheltering priests and 'suspect persons'. In 1605 they came under the shadow of the Gunpowder Plot. Henry Ferrers and Miles Windsor were known antiquaries, and their cousin George, the last male Brome, also seems to have been one in his own right. Brome recusancy created one final posthumous stir: on Twelfth Night 1630, villagers of Holton and Wheatley conspired to bury an elderly recusant lady in the chancel of Holton church. Known only by her married name until now, Elizabeth Horseman turns out to have been the last of the recusant Bromes.¹

Holton lies in what Tolkien called 'Hobbit territory', south-east of Oxford. At the heart of this sleepy hollow with its ancient church and modern comprehensive school is a medieval deer park. In Tudor times the 'Castle' on the moated island at the centre of Holton Park was domesticated into an 18-hearth 'Halleplace' for the Bromes and later the Whorwoods. General Fairfax is said to have made it his headquarters in 1646 in front of Oxford, and Cromwell's daughter married Henry Ireton there just as Oxford fell. The island mansion was demolished in 1805 and the rubble went into the building of a Regency gothick replacement nearby. After passing through various families and wartime armies, the Park is now campus for a school and a university. Sixth-formers, rabbits and California redwoods took over the empty island and memories of the Reformation at Holton vanished from record.²

Local and family loyalties were tested by Elizabeth I's religious settlement of 1559. In 1558 a Holton churchwarden's will was formulated firmly in Catholic Europe, 'under our sovereign lord and lady Philip and Mary, by the grace of God King and Queen of England, Spain, France, both Sicilies, Jerusalem and Ireland, Defenders of the Faith, archdukes of Austria, dukes of Burgundy, Milan and Brabant, counts of Hapsburg, Flanders and Tyrol'.³

¹ For background see *V.C.H. Oxon.* v, 168-77; *Visitations of Oxfordshire* (Harleian Soc. v), 229f. Historians have overlooked the recusancy of the Bromes, and more surprisingly that of the Windsors, and the control by both of Baddesley Clinton. 'Brome' has frequently been misread and indexed as 'Browne'.

² C. Peters, *The Lords Lieutenant and High Sheriffs of Oxfordshire* (1995), 107: the title 'Holton Castle' in 1596 probably reflected its antiquarian owner; K. Heritage, 'Holton Park', in J. Fox (ed.), *One More Millennium, The Story of Wheatley and Holton Park* (2000), 24-7. For the moated house site, see Oxon C.C. Monument Reports, Scheduled Ancient Monument 30823.

³ Will of John Chyche, churchwarden, 1558: Oxfordshire Record Office (hereafter O.R.O.), MS Wills Oxon. 183.8. Thanks are due to Caroline Dalton, New College Archivist, for her collecting of Wheatley and Holton wills over many years.

A year later the roods and altars in his church were dismantled for the second time, leaving masonry scars to the present day, and anniversary requiems, even for Sir John Brome (d. 1558), were banned. In growing recusant reaction, a neighbour of the Bromes willed in 1577 'that my body be buried in the midst of the cross way [transept] of Cuddesdon church where the Crucifix did stand and, I trust in God, again shall stand'.⁴

THE EXTENDED BROMES

William Brome (d. 1461), the younger son of Baddesley Clinton Hall, Warwickshire, married a Baldington of Albury, near Holton. He rebuilt Holton church c. 1450, just as his father was remodelling Baddesley Clinton, and eight generations of Bromes are buried in the church chancel.⁵ William's great-grandson John Brome (d. 1558) prospered to knighthood and sheriffdom with a string of former monastic advowsons and manors, to which his wife, Margaret Rous, added Ragley manor, Warwickshire. They had eight daughters and a male heir. Sir John executed Oxfordshire rebels under Edward VI in 1549, helped by sons-in-law Power and Denton, then officiated at the burning of Cranmer under Mary in March 1556. Two weeks later, with the scene in Canditch (The Broad) fresh in mind, he composed his own will 'in this bottomless pit of misery and wickedness'.⁶ The times bred mental reservation: his will shifts between Catholic and Calvinist phraseology; the inventories of Holton church goods to the confiscators of 1552 are also suspiciously threadbare.

Sir Christopher Brome inherited Holton in 1558 and married Elizabeth Wenman, granddaughter of Lord Williams of Thame Park. The marriage was brief, but it made Christopher nephew to Henry Norreys of Rycote, Queen Elizabeth's former warden and favourite. The young widower then married Lady Eleanor Windsor of Hewell Grange, Worcestershire, daughter of William, 2nd Baron Windsor, a senior courtier (see Fig. 1). Her brother and nephews were favourites of Mary and Elizabeth; her grandfather, Andrew Windsor, deliberated in the Reformation Parliament and signed the 1530 ultimatum to the Pope; her father, Lord William, led the mourning at Edward's Calvinist funeral, then led his trainband to Norfolk to support Catholic Mary.

Eleanor's sister, Bridget, married Edward Ferrers (1526-1564) of Baddesley Clinton, grandson of the last (female) Brome of that house. The Windsors had lived at Hewell Grange, 14 miles from Baddesley Clinton, since 1543, although Bradenham near High Wycombe was their family seat. After 1563 they lodged the Ferrers family at Hewell, when Baddesley Clinton fell on hard times; Edward Ferrers died there soon afterwards. Lord Edward Windsor's wife, Catherine, was a wealthy and flagrant recusant⁷ and most of his eight Windsor sisters married recusants, but Bridget (Windsor) Ferrers and Eleanor (Windsor) Brome of Holton reunited distancing family branches at Holton and Baddesley Clinton in kinship as well as in recusancy (see Fig. 2). Aristocratic wives also put obscure

⁴ Will of Richard Archdale of Wheatley manor house, 1577: O.R.O., MS Wills Oxon. 185.496.

⁵ *V.C.H. Oxon.* v, 176; C. Norman, *Baddesley Clinton* (rev. edn. 2002).

⁶ P.R.O., PROB 11/42A (P.C.C. 15 Welles).

⁷ E. Berry, *Henry Ferrers, An Early Warwickshire Antiquary, 1549-1633* (Dugdale Soc. Occas. Papers, 16), 5-6; *V.C.H. Worcs.* ii, 52; iii, 226; iv, 223; also *D.N.B.* Lady Catherine (de Vere) Windsor was a recusant in 1577, two years after the death of her husband Lord Edward: P. Ryan (ed.), *Diocesan Recusant Returns 1577* (Catholic Rec. Soc. (hereafter C.R.S.), 22), 65. She and her retinue were also listed in 1596: C. Talbot (ed.), *Cecil Papers* (C.R.S. 53), 129; also listed in 1592-3 and 1596 were Thomas and Bridget Blount (née Brome) of Astley and Kidderminster: M. Calthorpe (ed.), *Recusant Exchequer Roll I, 1592-3* (C.R.S. 18), 365.

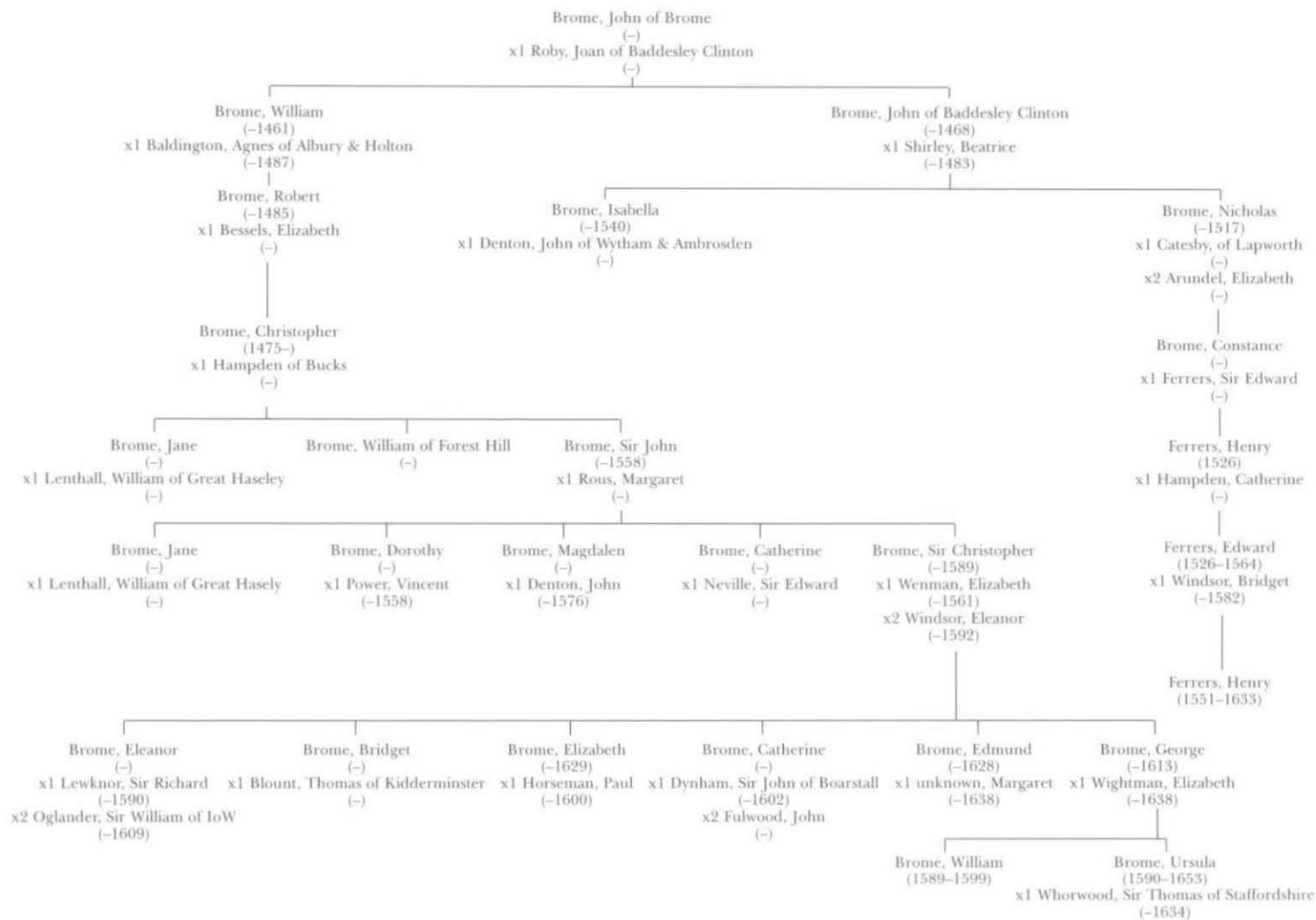


Fig. 1. Brome (with Ferrers) of Baddesley Clinton and Holton.

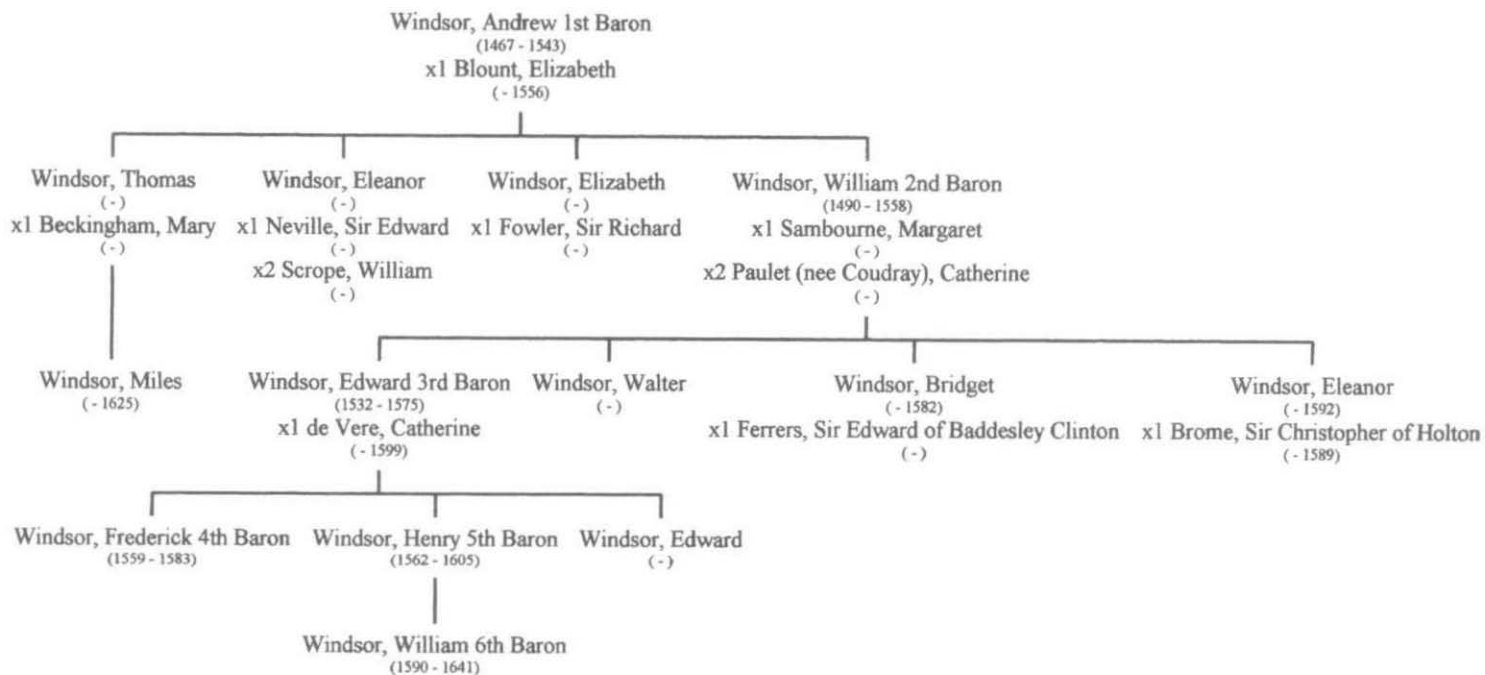


Fig. 2. Windsor of Bradenham and Hewell Grange.

gentry houses onto the social map. In March 1561 Sir Christopher Brome, along with Edmund Windsor and Thomas Hawes of Warwickshire, obtained Baddesley Clinton for £1,500; one Walter Giffard of High Onn (Staffs) acted as witness to the agreement, in effect a trust deed.⁸ The money met Ferrers's family debts and in 1563 the property reverted to the family, but only on a 12-year lease.

Sir John Brome's grandson, William Lenthall of Great Haseley, married a sister of the Jesuit poet, Robert Southwell. Granddaughter Eleanor Lenthall married Abraham Horseman, recusant, also of Great Haseley. They had three children in the 1560s of whom Isobel married a brother of Thomas Belson, executed in Oxford in 1589 for 'conveying intelligence between priests'.⁹ Isobel's brother John was married before a Marian priest in November 1588 'without the Parson's knowledge, in the night time'.¹⁰ Isobel's other brother, Paul, married his cousin, Elizabeth Brome of Holton, another granddaughter of Sir John, in 1588 (see Fig. 3).¹¹ Marrying in the bride's church or home was customary, and the rector, Bartholomew Price, her father's appointee, may have performed the wedding. He outlived Elizabeth, promising in their old ages to conduct her funeral, but events overtook him.

Ferrerses and Windsors travelling the Worcestershire-Warwickshire-Oxford-Bradtenham-London circuit knew Holton hospitality. Henry Ferrers (b.1551), son of Sir Edward and Lady Bridget, was a meticulous genealogist who knew where every blood-relative lived, studied at Oxford and spent decades in London. Holton and Hewell controlled his purse strings into late middle age; George Brome witnessed his marriage settlement in 1582, and in 1586 was reportedly involved in his illegal mass centre. By 1589, Ferrers owed Sir Christopher Brome £160, and re-mortgaged Baddesley Clinton 1595-1606 to George Brome and Walter Giffard to cover his debts.¹² The London-Worcester road passed by Holton Park, halfway between the capital and the arc of recusant houses in the South

⁸ Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Records Office (hereafter S.B.T.R.O.), DR 3/315, 10 Mar. 1561. The Holton Bromes held Baddesley Clinton together with the Windsors as collateral for the debts and sustenance of the Ferrers family 1561-1606: S.B.T.R.O., DR3/315-353. Walter Giffard was long associated with this arrangement, as witness in 1561, as brother-in-law to Henry Ferrers (S.B.T.R.O., DR3/342 – they married sisters) and as mortgage lender with George Brome 1595-1606. The Giffard brothers were notable recusants and exiles, their grandmother and mother Throckmortons of Coughton. William became archbishop of Rheims, George and Gilbert became Jesuits, the latter a leading conspirator-informer in the Babington Plot. Walter, the eldest (d. 1632), was excommunicate in 1601 and their sister Jane married John Yate, recusant of Buckland, Berks: A. Petti (ed.), *Recusant Documents from the Ellesmere Manuscripts* (C.R.S. 60), 113; *V.C.H. Staffs.* v, 28, 44, 248-52; *Historical Collections of Staffs.* iv, pt. 2 (1883), 52-63; also *D.N.B.*

⁹ C. Kelly, *Blessed Thomas Belson* (1987), 117-19, genealogies; Kelly missed the significance of the 1586 search at Boarstall House, and of the Brome family itself.

¹⁰ Great Haseley parish reg., Nov. 1588 and May 1589, transcript in O.R.O.

¹¹ Sir Christopher Brome's will, Apr. 1589: P.R.O., PROB 11/74 (P.C.C. 65 Leicester) left '£420 on All Souls Day in full discharge of the marriage money of my daughter Elizabeth Horseman'; Elizabeth Horseman is identified from this as a Brome for the first time. Great Haseley registers record the Horseman children. A John Horseman had been servant to Sir Adrian Fortescue of Britwell, imprisoned in 1534 for refusing the Oath of Supremacy. The Horsemans remained recusants throughout Elizabeth's reign.

¹² For Ferrers at Oxford, see J. Foster, *Alum. Oxon.* (1892); Berry, op. cit. note 7, n. 3. Ferrers was born 1551, not 1549 as in most modern authorities: S.B.T.R.O., DR 3/543; DR 3/320. George Brome witnessed Ferrers's pre-nuptial settlement: S.B.T.R.O., DR 3/328, 20 Sept. 1582. Ferrers's debt is in Sir Christopher Brome's will. Ferrers lived continually beyond his means – dandy, gourmet, bibliophile, interior designer – and was imprisoned for debt, but still lamented a son who would hunt cats rather than work: S.B.T.R.O., DR 3/720.

Midlands between Worcester and Northampton.¹³ A hundred miles made for a two- or even three-day journey; a relative's house and change of horse were always preferable to an inn. The Lords Windsor at Hewell spent 'the most part of the summer' at Bradenham; the family hosted the Queen there in progress from Oxford in 1566; they attended family funerals in their chapel of Bradenham church; they also frequented London – Lady Catherine inherited Windsor Place on Silver Street on Lord Edward's death, while her sons Frederick and Henry, Court favourites like their father, travelled south frequently to Court, Parliament or to the Continent on royal missions.

Royal favour, however, had its limits. Miles Windsor, Eleanor Brome's first cousin and an Oxford don, rode in the progress of 1566 – the Queen's 'pretty young man'. Eleanor's brother, Lord Edward, led the royal escort of knights. The caravan court passed Holton Park on its way to Rycote, home of Henry Norreys, Sir Christopher Brome's uncle by his first marriage, and from there to the Windsors at Bradenham. Within two years Miles Windsor was expelled from Corpus for recusancy, Lady Brome was first arrested at Mass, and Lord Edward Windsor slipped abroad, ostensibly for his health.¹⁴

Large families wove complex networks. Bromes, Windsors, Powells, Cursons, Belsons, Powers, Lenthalls, Horsemans and Stonors were linked by marriage and recusant conviction. Dorothy Brome married Vincent Power, son of Mary (Curson) of Waterperry, while Mary's sister, Ann, was grandmother of Thomas Belson. Waterperry House, plainly visible two miles from Holton, became a Jesuit safe house; Curson daughters joined convents in Flanders and Martha (Curson) became mistress of Stonor Park, hub of the southern Catholic underground. Family ties were sometimes doubly reinforced: Magdalen Brome married John Denton of Ambrosden near Bicester, grandson of Isabella Brome of Baddesley Clinton. Catherine Brome married Sir Edward Neville, her cousin already since Neville's father had married Eleanor Windsor, aunt to Eleanor (Windsor) Brome of Holton. Two generations of wives and sisters formed a recusant network in themselves (see Figs. 1 and 2).¹⁵

LADY ELEANOR BROME OF HOLTON

Holton was a step down in status for Eleanor; but she and Sir Christopher Brome had much in common. Their fathers had welcomed Mary's accession and while Lord Windsor sat on Mary's heresy commission, Sir John Brome helped oversee Cranmer's execution. Windsor, Brome and Ferrers refashioned notable houses at Bradenham, Holton, Hewell and Baddesley Clinton. Sir Christopher and Lady Eleanor had two sons, six daughters, much

¹³ P. Caraman, *Henry Garnet and the Gunpowder Plot* (1964), 334-5: it took three days in winter 1605 to reach High Wycombe from Worcester along this road. The South Midlands axis of recusant houses and families, W.-E. from Worcester to Northampton, has been Hindlip (Habington), Huddington (Wintour), Coughton (Throckmorton), Baddesley Clinton (Ferrers), Ashby St. Ledger (Catesby), Harrowden (Vaux). To these may be added Hewell Grange (Windsor), Lapworth (Catesby), Norwood (Wright) and possibly Greatworth, Northants., held by Edward Windsor. Many of these families were implicated in the Gunpowder Plot.

¹⁴ For Miles Windsor see A. Collins, *Historical Collection of the Windsor Family* (1754), 59; N. Tyacke (ed.), *Hist. Univ. Oxford*, iv (1997), 645-8; Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS. 266, I, f. 127v.; T. Fowler, *History of Corpus Christi College* (1893), 110-13, 126; M. Foster, 'Thomas Allen, Gloucester Hall and the Survival of Catholicism in Post-Reformation Oxford', *Oxonienia*, xlv (1981), 99-128, passim.

¹⁵ Magdalen Denton, widow of Ambrosden, was fined £280 for recusancy: H. Bowler (ed.), *Recusant Exchequer Roll II 1593-4* (C.R.S. 57), 127.

debt and an unquiet life, largely because Lady Brome 'stood stoutly' by her recusancy as did at least six of her children – George Brome, Edmund Brome, Catherine Dynham, Elizabeth Horseman, Bridget Blount and possibly Eleanor Lewknor, later Oglander (see Fig. 1).¹⁶

Gentry family networks facilitated recusancy and steered it. Fugitive priests, mainly gentry themselves, posed as servants, hunters, tutors and doctors, and could travel a carpet of safe recusant properties in South Oxfordshire, as they could in Warwickshire and Worcestershire. In the 1580s and 90s they could ride over Denton lands at Ambrosden and Blackthorn, across Dynham lands at Boarstall and Piddington, through Belson country by Brill and Oakley, on into Curson holdings around Waterperry, then through Brome lands stretching from Holton to the walls of Oxford, on to Horseman and Lenthall land at Haseley and much further beyond in several directions. The Bromes' closest neighbours were recusants, the Cursons at Waterperry, the Archdales at Wheatley and the Stampes of Holton. The road was all the smoother for lack of a bishop in Oxfordshire for 40 of the 45 years of Elizabeth's reign. Oxford's Marian bishop-elect of 1558, Thomas Goldwell, remained a refugee in Italy until his death in 1585, an encouragement for local recusants.

Recusants met through the Middle Temple, as in a modern London club, and negotiated marriages there. In 1589 it was 'pestered with papists' and Ferrers and Windsor arms coloured the lights in its Great Hall. Henry Ferrers was admitted on his majority in 1572, practising there for over two decades. Richard Archdale was admitted in 1551, while William Lord Windsor was Master of Benchers. Lady Eleanor's brother, Lord Edward, was admitted in 1548, following their father and grandfather, and her husband died owing money to Richard Archdale's brother of the Middle Temple. Bromes, Archdales, Powers, Ferrerses, Cursons, Dentons and Stonors found strength and support in the Middle Temple network.¹⁷

Early on Palm Sunday, 1574, the bishop of London ordered simultaneous raids on four massing houses in the City. The first seminary priests had landed and one boasted of '500 Masses said in England that day'. Many were arrested. 'At Mr. Carus's house beside Limehouse, near London, were found by the Recorder of London, not at Mass, but with all things prepared for the saying of Mass, Thomas Carus Esq. and his wife [Anne], one [?William] Thornborrow Esq., and the Lady Brome'. The dean of Norwich in a letter to his bishop added that '53 were taken at four Masses, mainly ladies, gentlemen and gentlewomen. Twenty-two stood stoutly to the matter and chief among them ... Lady Morley and Lady Brome (who had paid before 100 marks for her offence)'.¹⁸ Eleanor's son George, aged about 14, was also arrested. Four months later the Privy Council wrote to the lord mayor of London 'for taking order of such as were lately taken at the hearing of Mass ... on paying their fines... they may be discharged from their imprisonment, and such as will not pay to remain in prison. And that Lady Brome remain with one of the sheriffs or an alderman until she either compound or some other order be taken against her'.¹⁹

Eleanor passed from house arrest into the Tower before the end of 1574, an aristocratic lawbreaker, defiant despite separation from growing children. During her imprisonment, her brother Lord Edward died in Venice in 1575, 'the most devout lord of his great name'. He had soldiered with great distinction under Philip and Mary against the French and the royal couple rewarded him. Elizabeth had continued Mary's favour, although it was

¹⁶ Sir Christopher Brome's will of 1589 (see note 11 above) names all the family.

¹⁷ *Middle Temple Admissions Register*, i (1501-1781), and Index, iii (1949); *Middle Temple Benchers* (1912).

¹⁸ J. Strype, *Annals of the Reformation* (1724), i, ch. 32, 335. In April 1568 the Spanish ambassador had reported to Philip II that Ladies 'Browne' and Cave (wife to Sir Thomas Cave of the Middle Temple) were taken at Mass: *Cal. S.P. Spanish, 1568-79*, 22, 64.

¹⁹ *Acts of the Privy Council* (hereafter *A.P.C.*) 1571-5, 270.

whispered in diplomatic circles that Lord Edward was ready to take arms against her in favour of Mary of Scots. His stay in Spa from 1573 may have been for more than the waters. His heart was buried in the family chapel at Bradenham, but his body, pointedly, in Liège cathedral.²⁰ In April 1578 the Council declared that

Lady Brome, wife to Sir Christopher, lately committed as a prisoner to the Tower of London by the Bishop of London and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for some misdemeanours and for obstinacy against the present state of religion... now shows some signs of repentance and promises to be of better conformity... [We] give order to the Lieutenant of the Tower for her delivery out of his custody, to set her at liberty.²¹

Sir Christopher Brome had posted a bond of £300 for her good behaviour and attendance at church. Lady Eleanor and George returned across Holton moat at Easter 1578, exactly four years after arrest, to be met by seven children and a relieved husband. Before the end of the year the Privy Council released her servant Elizabeth Bar(h)am from the Gatehouse prison 'where she hath ever since remained after being together with Lady Brome apprehended and committed on matters of religion... she seems to be very penitent and a poor young woman of little means. [She is to be] forthwith set at liberty'.²²

THE LODGER

Thomas Griffiths, presented by Sir Christopher Brome as rector of Holton with Forest Hill, 1579-84, was one of many Welshmen who flocked to Oxford University in the Tudor period, encouraged by the 1536 Act of Union. They also manned local parishes in a diocese bereft of clergy and made careers in Oxfordshire. In 1584 Griffiths was presented to Watlington, and another Oxford graduate, Bartholomew Price, possibly also Welsh, was chosen by Brome for Holton. At the same time Hugh Davies, a younger Welsh contemporary of Price at St. Mary Hall, a Catholic hotbed on High Street, was presented by Brome's son-in-law, John Dynham of Boarstall House, to the chapelry of Boarstall-in-Oakley. A St. Mary contemporary of both men, Thomas Belson, left for Rheims in 1583 without his BA, on account of the newly required Oath of Supremacy for graduates. Belson was closely related to the Bromes (see Fig. 3).²³

Price was appointed before the summer of 1584, but found Holton rectory uninhabitable. He traded the income of the living with Sir Christopher for an annual stipend, a horse, cloth for his gowns, four loads of firewood, and most importantly 'a chamber to lodge in the manor house of Holton'.²⁴ It was a testing post and Price's 50 years' incumbency began in controversy. On 7 September 1584, John Gadbury of Wheatley rang the Holton bell in the

²⁰ *Cal. S.P. Rome, 1558-71*, 266, 376, 412: Ridolfi and diplomatic letters 1567 and 1571 named Lord Edward as ready to support a coup; he seems to have been loyal to the Crown, if not its church, bequeathing to the Queen his diamond cross, 'under which banner I lived to fight'; *Cal. S.P. Rome 1572-8*, 194, letter from Count Caraffa to Count Colonna on Lord Edward's death and funeral in Venice, January 1575. For the Windsor family see Collins, *Hist. Collection of Windsor Family*; W.P. Williams, *A Monograph of the Windsor Family* (1829); K. Glass, *Bradenham Manor, Past and Present* (1986); *D.N.B.*

²¹ *A.P.C. 1577-8*, 205; J.H. Pollen (ed.), *Lists of Prisoners for Ecclesiastical Causes, 1577-80* (C.R.S. 1), 61.

²² *A.P.C. 1577-8*, 438.

²³ *Alum. Oxon.*; *V.C.H. Oxon.* v, 161; Kelly, op. cit. note 9, genealogies, 117-19.

²⁴ O.R.O., Oxf. Dioc. Papers c. 23, ff. 19-20; J. Howard-Drake (ed.), *Oxford Church Courts, Depositions 1592-6* (1998), no. 46.

evening, the banned Vigil of the Virgin Mary's Birthday (Autumn Lady Day, 8 September). When the young rector burst in and threw Gadbury's hat out of the door in anger, Gadbury threatened to box his ears. September 7th was also Queen Elizabeth's birthday and Gadbury claimed that he was loyally 'ringing for the Queen', a common ruse for baiting puritans. Gadbury had to do public penance in Holton church.²⁵

Sir Christopher needed the money from Price's living. He sold St. John's College its present frontage in 1576 and borrowed heavily from the city of Oxford – £100 in 1577 against his Northgate properties including Canditch, £80 in 1581 against a gold chain, an unsecured £100 in 1582. He also sold venison and timber from Holton to the city. In 1585 his debts were called in. He broke up his Ducklington manor into small long-term (2,000-year) leases in 1587, and his will of 1589 was full of debts to be discharged, generosity to be paid for, 40s. for each of a dozen servants (and their back pay), and three daughters' dowries (£800 each) still to be found. He ordered the redeeming from pawn in London of £350-worth of jewels and plate, the repayment of £150 each to John Stampe of Holton, to two cousins in London and to colleagues Lewknor and Archdale of the Middle Temple. He in turn was owed money on Baddesley Clinton by Henry Ferrers and Lord Henry Windsor. With belated piety, he met his father's last request of 1558, directing 'a marble stone to be laid on the tombs of Sir John and Dame Margaret Brome now buried in the chancel of the parish church of Holton'.²⁶ In contrast, his wife's family passed on ever-increasing tracts of land and growing piles of plate and jewels in successive wills, their recusancy apparently cushioned by their favour at Court.

Rector Bartholomew Price lodged in Holton Hall until Lady Brome's death in 1592 when he left the house for the park keeper's lodge and in 1594 challenged George Brome in court over his income agreement. His later years were spent in the rectory house in Holton, where he suffered a miserable lingering death.

'THE HISSING OF A FEW GREEN TWIGS'

Curate Hugh Davies had a much briefer ministry. In June 1586 John Dynham of Boarstall House 'upon a sudden displeasure discharged' him from the nearby chapel. Alone and destitute, Davies received 'comfort and help from George Brome [Dynham's brother-in-law] who lay in Boarstall House'. Since 1584 Brome and a friend, Robert Atkins, had been pressing Davies to 'forsake the ministry and go over the sea to Rheims' as Belson, his college contemporary, had done in 1583. They renewed the pressure, although Davies always said that he dreaded discovery and the gallows. They told him that recusants in Brill led by John and Anne Butler had such 'good opinion of [him that] he would prove a very good Catholic' if only he mixed with Catholics. The Butlers, living at Ixhill, the Belson family home, in 1585, were known harbourers of priests and Anne was Thomas Belson's sister. Atkins offered to 'bring him to a Mass' and promised him a hundred testimonials to the exiles at Rheims.

²⁵ E.R.C. Brinkworth (ed.), *Archdeacon's Court Liber Actorum, 1584* (ORS, xxiii, 1942), 89.

²⁶ P.R.O., PROB 11/74 (P.C.C. 65 Leicester); W.H. Turner (ed.), *Records of the City of Oxford, 1509-83* (1880), 158, 345, 418, 425; H. Salter (ed.), *Oxford Council Acts, 1583-1626* (OHS, 87, 1927), 17, 356. Sir Christopher could not meet his father's wishes for anniversary requiem masses and prayers for the dead, due to the outlawing of Catholic rituals in 1559.

Hanging, boasted Atkins vengefully, held no fears, 'happy to so lose my life for such a cause, for then I would be a martyr to sit with Christ in Heaven to judge and condemn all those heretics'.²⁷

That same summer the hue and cry arose for the Babington plotters who conspired to release and enthrone Mary of Scots. A government 'sting' allowed Mary and leading recusants enough rope to incriminate themselves, 'the hissing of a few green twigs of their own kindling', as a Brome Jesuit cousin described it.²⁸ Hugh Davies, haunted by his memory of 'treason conversations' with Brome and Atkins, wrote from Oxford to John Croke JP of Chilton near Boarstall. 'Being born a Welshman [he] cannot readily express himself [and] sometimes stammers and staggers in his speech', but Croke understood enough to notify the Privy Council immediately, justifying his 'zeal and suspicion' on grounds of the recent 'detestable conspiracy intended against her Majesty (whom God preserve long to reign over us even to the last day of the world if it may so stand with his holy will) by Giffard, Babington and a great number of other traitorous conspirators'. Whatever Davies may have told him beyond the record, Croke could not prove it, 'finding not such matters as I did look for'.²⁹ Sir Christopher Brome, perhaps with feigned indignation, later accused Croke of harassment of the Dynhams and Bromes. Queen Elizabeth herself rebuked Croke in Parliament for sycophancy.

Davies alleged that Brome offered him passage to France, new friends, re-ordination within months, and no lack of income, unlike his present predicament. Disguised as a servant and given his 'nature and youthful disposition' it would be 'long before any man would suppose him to be a priest'. Brome dwelt on the 'contemptible fate' of the monasteries and the seizure by Crown, nobility and gentry of most of the church's property, making of the English church a 'political and imposturing Macchiavelli's religion'. As a bibliophile and budding antiquary, Brome knew the cultural cost of the Reformation. His recusant generation, confronted with the asset-stripped national church and perhaps feeling nostalgic for a golden age, may have been critical of their grandparents, less for abolishing the monasteries, than for allowing church assets to be squandered by Crown and nobility, and for taking part in the traffic themselves, as Bromes, Dynhams, Windsors and Giffards had all done. Brome's copy of the banned satire on the plunder of church property, *Leicester's Commonwealth*, would have reinforced his sentiments. Antiquaries, by looking back to an idealised Catholic age, could at times be suspect in Elizabeth's reign.³⁰

Davies feared offending George Brome, knowing the family had livings at its disposal. He stalled by agreeing to attach himself to some gentleman, at which Brome insisted he talk with 'Mr Henry Ferris [sic] of Warwickshire, cousin to George Brome, who promised, if [Davies]

²⁷ Details of the Boarstall episode are taken from P.R.O., SP 12/192/52(1); SP 12/192/54; SP 12/193/11-12; SP 12/193/18-19; see also *V.C.H. Bucks.* i, 351ff; *Cal. S.P. Roman 1586*, 210, 213, 309. Robert Atkins, yeoman of Boarstall, was convicted in 1591 of recusancy in 1587: H. Bowler and T. McCann (eds.), *Recusants 1581-92* (C.R.S. 71); Robert Atkins of St. Clements was fined 1594/5: H. Bowler (ed.), *Recusant Exchequer Roll II* (C.R.S. 57), 127; Robert Atkins, musician of St. Clements, and wife Philippa were excommunicate in 1604: A. Petti (ed.), *Recusant Documents from the Ellesmere MSS* (C.R.S. 60), 132-6. See also 'Oxford Recusants, 1603-1629', *N. Oxon. Arch. Soc.* 13 (1924). The Atkins of Bolshipton lived by St. Clements church and tenanted Bolshipton manor when Sir John Brome acquired it. In 1574 a Robert Atkins answered the Herald's Visitation as clerk to the city council. For John and Anne Butler see Kelly, op. cit. note 9, pp. 28-9.

²⁸ Robert Southwell on the Babington Plot, quoted in P. Caraman (ed.), *William Weston, Autobiography of an Elizabethan* (1955), 98. See also C. Devlin, *Life of Robert Southwell* (1967).

²⁹ P.R.O., SP 12/192/52 and 52(1).

³⁰ Berry, op. cit. note 7, p. 4; J. McConica, *Hist. Univ. Oxford*, iii (1986), 717.

would be reconciled to the Catholic church, to bring him to the hearing of a Mass where the company of a great many fine Catholics would rejoice at his conversion'. Ferrers sent him Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and promised to send 'such men as would be happy to convert him to that Catholic religion ... priests and Jesuits known to be perfect men both internally and outwardly [with] any manner of blessings. But they had not so much blessing as in a crooked finger'. Something told Brome, Atkins and Ferrers that Davies was a liability, book offers were withdrawn and 'Henry Ferris refused to make him privy to the place where the Mass was to be said or to perform his other promises'. There is no indication of where Ferrers's Mass centre was located: he lodged in London, had property in Oakley and Brill, and his home at Baddesley Clinton became a Jesuit safe house at this time or very soon afterwards.³¹

George Brome and Hugh Davies may have been Oxford contemporaries, but Brome is not recorded there. He may have studied privately and briefly, leaving around 1581 when the Oath of Supremacy and residence was required. Thomas Belson, from Ixhill Lodge near Boarstall, was certainly Davies's contemporary at St. Mary Hall and one of twelve students who left Oxford for Rheims in 1583. Davies may have considered following them and Brome may have known it. Atkins, a musician and possibly a family tutor, spoke with clerical fervour about martyrdom, heavenly revenge and about how he had been a 'means himself to save Mrs. Dynham's soul in confirming her in the Catholic religion'. These 'treason conversations', which Brome and Atkins repeatedly charged Davies not to disclose, took place in 1584-6; Belson left for Rheims in 1583, returned in 1584 and was arrested in June 1585. He had been a year in the Tower when Davies wrote to Croke, and was released for banishment at the start of 1587 when the prisons were overflowing with Babington suspects. He spent some of his 40 days' grace at Ixhill attending to family business before leaving. He broke his bond by returning two years later, after the Armada crisis, and was executed at Oxford.

George Brome was cousin to both Belson and to the Jesuit Robert Southwell, just landed in England in 1586 (see Fig. 3). Another cousin, Henry, 5th Baron Windsor, attended a Catholic gentry conference at Harleyford Manor, Marlow, in July 1586, and was colourfully reported to Philip II by the Spanish ambassador in London as being ready with 1,000 men to liberate Mary Stuart from her prison 'near to where he lives'.³² Edward Windsor, Lord Henry's younger brother, was a fugitive until November 1586 when he was arrested and charged with plotting to kill Elizabeth in favour of Mary Stuart.³³ Back in 1571 his father, Lord Edward, had been named by Ridolfi in a similar plot. Through administering Baddesley Clinton and Henry Ferrers, the Windsors and Bromes also had long association with Walter Giffard, whose brother Gilbert was the leading Babington conspirator-provocateur. Understandably George felt closely the heat and frustration of the cause.

³¹ P.R.O., SP 12/193/11 and 11(1); S.B.T.R.O., DR 3/320; Berry, op. cit. note 7, p. 17 n.3, queries the identity of the Henry Ferrers in the Boarstall episode; Kelly, op. cit. note 9, p. 48, calls him 'a servant of George Brome'. The 'Warwickshire cousin' designation, however, is unambiguous. A 1580 lodging of Ferrers in London is named in S.B.T.R.O., DR 3/717 and 718, and this, Boarstall House, Ixhill Lodge (the Belson and Butler home) and Baddesley Clinton were the likely Mass centres.

³² *Cal. S.P. Spanish, 1580-6*, 604, 606, 623, Spanish ambassador in London to Philip II between 13 Aug. and 10 Sept. 1586. Henry's brother Edward was reportedly ready to be a hostage for the good faith of those pledged to kill Elizabeth.

³³ J.H. Pollen (ed.), *Official List (II) of Catholic Prisoners, Tower of London Returns* (C.R.S. 2), 281, 286, in 1588 records Edward Windsor in the Tower since Nov. 1586; Edward was eventually set free 'on Lord Windsor's earnest suit', the family being required to give him 'good advice and counsel to carry himself to obtain her majesty's favour', but his wife, 'the cause of her husband's greater infection in religion [who has] no good opinion held of her', was in 1589 ordered out of London by the Queen: *A.P.C. 1588-9*, 311-12.

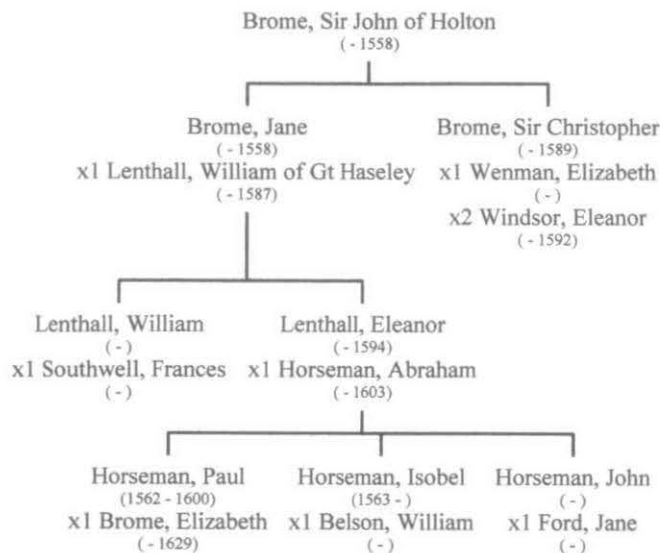


Fig. 3. The Brome, Belson and Southwell connection.

THE SEARCH AT BOARSTALL³⁴

Still single, George had lodged in Boarstall House with his sister and brother-in-law 'two or three years past', assisting John Dynham as steward of the royal forest of Bernwood; the work often required Sir Christopher's staying over from Holton. Brome's young bravado may have echoed family conversations behind closed doors at Holton or Boarstall, if not those of conspirators. On the strength of Croke's alert, the Council ordered a search of Brome's lodgings 'for seditious books'. On Saturday, 26 August 1586, Brome's quarters in Boarstall House and Atkins's home were searched simultaneously. Atkins could not be found, nor any incriminating evidence in his house, though he openly admitted to being a recusant. At Boarstall House, however, Croke overreached himself by searching the whole house beyond George's rooms.

Three justices and 50 men spent from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. there, ransacking cupboards and breaking down doors. On arrival they were faced by Sir Christopher Brome, two of his daughters including Catherine Dynham, mistress of Boarstall, and Clovil Tanfield, a Northamptonshire cousin and courtier, fresh in from Court the night before.³⁵ As the day went on without result, Croke suspected a tip-off. They found Mrs. Dynham's Agnus Dei, crucifixes and 'such like papistical trumperies', and 'in a high turret' came upon statues, reliefs and a Mass table, but by 6 p.m. Croke had found evidence only of recusancy, not of conspiracy.³⁶ He may have been unaware of George Brome's link with Walter Giffard,

³⁴ This account of Croke's search of Boarstall House is based on his report to the Privy Council: P.R.O., SP 12/192/54.

³⁵ Two family names make up the personal name Clovil Tanfield, a common reciprocal courtesy in the christening of a first child; he was a distant cousin through Windsor and Brome marriages to the Nevilles. The Jesuit John Gerard adopted both of Tanfield's names as aliases, choices which were 'rarely fanciful': D.A. Bellenger, *English and Welsh Priests 1558-1800* (1984), 20, 231.

³⁶ At Boarstall Gatehouse a geometric consecration-type cross is still visible in the top room of a turret, possibly the 'high turret' oratory forced by Croke.

although Davies had made the relationship with Henry Ferrers quite plain. He certainly seemed unaware of the significance of the two papers he found in a trunk of George's clothes. One was a 1581/2 letter to Brome from Charles Paget, secretary to Mary Stuart's ambassador in Paris, and the other a 'proposition of the charge of officers in Berwick and Carlisle', the border garrisons with Scotland.³⁷

Brome explained the absence of papers – 'he used to burn all his letters after he had read them' – but he did have many 'corrupt and superstitious' books, which Croke listed, forwarding 'the worst and most portable'. These included Person's *Brief Discourse* forbidding church attendance, and the satire *Leicester's Commonwealth* (1584), possibly delivered from Paris by Belson and which Atkins had promised to lend to Davies. Campion's *Decem Rationes* (1581), secretly printed at Stonor Park, was also confiscated. Brome may have secured it at Oxford when it was illegally distributed in St. Mary's university church. Thomas Belson, Bartholomew Price, Hugh Davies, if not Brome himself, all lodging across High Street at St. Mary Hall, would have been there in June 1581 when copies were left on the benches before Commencement Disputations.

George Brome and Robert Atkins were summoned on 1 September to appear before the Council at Windsor where they cooled their heels for several days, Brome on his father's immense bond of £2,000. Davies also attended, but under protection 'in great fear of George Brome and Mr. Dynham that either they, their friends or servants will do him great mischief' – a Dynham servant had confronted him in Oxford, calling him 'sole cause of the search and trouble in Boarstall [with] so many enemies that he would find no tarrying neither in the university, nor in England, nor yet in Wales'. Sir Christopher Brome then wrote to the Council from Boarstall on 3 September to protest against the illegal searching of the Dynham home, where George was merely lodging. Croke, he insisted, acted out of malice, shown repeatedly already. A father knew his son, faults and all, and he knew George's loyalty, constantly shown in helping in the Queen's forest, 'otherwise I could wish he had never been born'. He asked for a speedy end to the investigation, adding that George 'hath a weak body and is very sickly'.³⁸

Outside events eclipsed the case and closed it. By 5 September the principal Babington conspirators had confessed and were executed before the month was out. Brome and Atkins were finally interrogated before the Council on 6 September and the case was dropped.³⁹

A minor episode that same summer begs attention. After the Harleyford Manor conference of Jesuits and Catholic gentry, 14-22 July 1586, and shortly before his own arrest, the Jesuit William Weston 'went immediately to Oxford. An urgent call had come from a family in great distress and needing comfort and whatever advice and counsel I could give'. Did he go to Holton? Weston was a close friend of Edward Windsor, the conspirator and younger brother of Lord Henry. Edward may have been sheltering with his aunt Eleanor Brome at Holton, forewarned that the storm was about to break over Babington, or the Bromes may have held a crisis summit which Lord Henry may have confided to Weston. It appears that Weston returned via Bradenham, the Windsor seat.⁴⁰

³⁷ For Charles Paget and his exile brother, Lord Paget, see *D.N.B.* In 1581-3 Mary was plotting a Spanish invasion of England. Although Paget was a double agent, Walsingham mistrusted him and a letter from him to George Brome should have been taken more seriously.

³⁸ Sir Christopher Brome's letter to Walsingham, 3 Sept. 1586: P.R.O., SP 12/193/12.

³⁹ Record of the appearances before the Council at Windsor, 6 Sept. 1586: P.R.O., SP 12/193/18-19.

⁴⁰ Caraman, *William Weston*, 72, 78; Caraman asserts the close friendship of Weston and Lord Henry Windsor, but gives no sources. He also suggests that Bradenham was Weston's stopover after the flying visit to Oxford. For discussion of hides there, see Glass, *Bradenham Manor*, 5.

LADY ELEANOR'S LAST DEFIANCE

Sir Christopher Brome died in April 1589, leaving a decayed house, debts and £100 of 'household stuff and plate' to his widow Eleanor, but no endearments. The bond of £300 for her good behaviour was remitted to his son George at the end of the year, but more than that was needed to discharge debts, administer legacies, pay dowries and refurbish the Hall. 'If my son fails to administer my wishes, I ask my faithful friend [grandson] Edward Denton of Ambrosden and Bicester, and R[ichard] Lewknor [son-in-law] of Middle Temple [to do so]',⁴¹ George by then had married, and early in 1590 was himself admitted to the Middle Temple, where his younger brother Edmund, of Forest Hill, had registered eight years before. It was good training for the running of an encumbered estate, and an entrée into London society; it was also very Catholic. George's late entry may have made up for a university course aborted by the Oath of Supremacy in 1581, and Edmund's enrolment in 1582 may have been to avoid the same situation.

In August 1590 the Privy Council wrote to Lord Norreys of Rycote, who was lord lieutenant, and to two other gentlemen, John Doyley and Cromwell Lea, acknowledging receipt of 'certain examinations of the Lady Brome and others whereby it appeared that bad and suspected persons resorted unto her' and demanding they apprehend 'such as they thought to be most suspicious and cause them to be committed to prison that they may be examined of fit matters to be proposed on them'. George, who may have been one of the 'others' examined, complained that she was neglecting the condition on which the 'manor house of Holton and other lands' were left to her, namely that she 'conform herself in dutiful behaviour to Her Majesty's laws. Wherein her carriage and government hath been most obstinate and perverse, her house having been receptacle for evil and suspect persons and seminaries ... she lives so disorderly and unsubjectlike'.⁴² George virtually confirmed the accusation, as he distanced himself from his mother's recusancy and rescued the estate from neglect and her risky behaviour. The Council wrote to Lord Henry Windsor, Eleanor's nephew, and other family trustees overseeing her widow's income, including nephew Francis Power of Bletchingdon, brother Walter Windsor, grandson Edmund Denton and son-in-law Richard Lewknor. They were asked to hand over Holton Hall to George and to ensure Lady Brome's good behaviour. Two months later the Council, embarrassed that George had publicised the controversy with 'undutiful and unnatural demeanour', allowed Eleanor Brome her defence. They wrote to Lord Norreys, Sir Henry Unton, Sir Henry Lee and John Doyley in Oxfordshire,

She [says she] has been slandered and abused by information delivered against her to be a disobedient and undutiful subject, a receiver and harbourer of persons dangerous to the State, which she denies and desireth the same to be examined by you.⁴³

She also accused George of concealing from trustees lands where tenants were refusing to pay rents. The trustees were directed to see to her income, while the complaints of both parties were to be heard by Lord Henry Windsor, her nephew, with Lord Norreys present. All were to try to make 'some final end and agreement ... between a mother and son with the consent of them both ... agreeable to justice and equity'.

⁴¹ P.R.O., PROB 11/74 (P.C.C. 65 Leicester). For release of the bond to his heir, see *A.P.C.* 1589-90, 261.

⁴² *A.P.C.* 1590, 405-6.

⁴³ *A.P.C.* 1590-1, 36.

The outcome was that George would pay her rent for the Hall from the estate lands, but himself administer the house during her life 'for the better maintenance and repairing of the buildings greatly decayed'. Lady Eleanor died in 1592, leaving George free to balance the books. That year he sold for £3,000 the manor of Ragley, Warwickshire, which his grandmother Rous had brought on marriage in 1538. He had already sold off the picked bones of Ducklington manor, and the city of Oxford paid him the £100 balance on the sale of his manor of the Northgate Hundred, sealed in 1589 with an advance of £80. Presumably he paid off debts and began refurbishing Holton Hall; he certainly renewed the family mortgage on Baddesley Clinton, 1595-1606, to control Henry Ferrers's expenditure on style which still distinguishes the house today. George may have imitated Ferrers at Holton, but we have no means of knowing this. In the spirit of an antiquary whose family had been prevented by the Reformation from honouring their dead in the traditional ways, and following his father's wish, he did erect a fine marble monument to his parents and grandparents in the chancel of Holton church.⁴⁴

'EVIL AND SUSPECTED PERSONS AND SEMINARIES'?

Jesuit memoirs never identified their law-breaking hosts, but they gave clues. Oxford and south Oxfordshire were havens for secular and Jesuit priests on the run, although Lady Brome denied the accusation of harbouring, which was a capital offence. Of her relatives, Thomas Belson had been executed in Oxford in 1589, but Robert Southwell the Jesuit was still at work in 1590 in London and the Midlands. In the period 1587-91 the Jesuits are believed to have held their twice-yearly conference at Baddesley Clinton, leased by Henry Ferrers to the recusant Vaux sisters. In 1591 it was raided by pursuivants during one such conference and Jesuits John Gerard and Henry Garnet noted later that

regularly twice a year all of us came to give [to superior Henry Garnet] our six-monthly account [and in 1591] we had fixed on the same house [Baddesley] which we had *nearly always* used previously for the purpose, belonging to two sisters... for it had a very safe refuge in a well-hidden cave.⁴⁵

The first Jesuit conference of 1590, the year in which Lady Brome was charged with harbouring, took place in February-March; the second was due in late summer and she was accused in August. Travellers from the south-east to Warwickshire for either conference could have found refreshment at Holton, even an impromptu conference venue, Baddesley Clinton still remaining '*nearly always*' the venue. John Gerard sheltered regularly 1589-95 and 1597-1605 with Anne Curson at Waterperry and frequented Thame Park. Eleanor's family, Lords Edward, Frederick and Henry among them, were all accused of harbouring priests, as was Henry Ferrers; he, and possibly his mortgage holders, must have known of

⁴⁴ *Cal. S.P. Dom. 1591-4*, 280; Salter, *Oxford Council Acts 1583-1626*, xlii, 69; H. Salter (ed.), *Oxford City Properties* (OHS, 83, 1926), 254. George complained that the rent was too high: *A.P.C. 1590*, 426. Brome and Giffard assumed responsibility for the debts of Henry Ferrers: S.B.T.R.O., DR 3/338-53, Nov. 1595-May 1606; Berry, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 24.

⁴⁵ P. Caraman, *John Gerard, Autobiography of an Elizabethan* (1951), 40-1 and n.1, 225, 264; G. Anstruther, *Vaux of Harrowden* (1963), 185; *V.C.H. Oxon.* v, 298, 308.

the building of hides at Baddesley Clinton.⁴⁶ Other 'suspected persons' visiting Holton could have been Miles Windsor of Gloucester Hall, his students Abraham Archdale and the Catesby brothers, and even his former colleague at Corpus, Robert Harrison, the Brome appointee at Ducklington.⁴⁷

Rector Bartholomew Price, living in Holton Hall 1584-92, must have been privy to its crises and visitors and it is reasonable to ask whether humour, discretion and loyalty prevailed. Strange encounters happened in recusant times. In 1600, John Gerard, on the run from the Tower, found himself at Thame Park pretending to play cards and making polite conversation with George Abbott, master of University College and a serious puritan and future archbishop of Canterbury, who had arrived unannounced. Gerard kept a poker face, but across the table, Lady Agnes Wenman, a Brome relative by marriage, had to suppress her giggles and the tale was relished in the telling.⁴⁸

GEORGE BROME'S LATER YEARS

George lowered his recusant profile after his father's death in 1589 and publicly criticised his mother. Henry Ferrers also disapproved of recusancy, whether Catholic or Puritan, and pinned his hope on tolerant monarchs.⁴⁹ After four decades of hardship, most Catholics wanted to let sleeping dogs lie. They had always been divided over the morality and wisdom of conforming or refusing. Both antiquaries may have escaped into books and the past. George must have mellowed with marriage, children and perhaps a good Protestant wife (his complaint about his mother in 1590 was made a year or two after he married; his wife Elizabeth later gave a pulpit to Holton church). His cousin Mary Horseman, also convicted and fined for youthful recusancy, married an Anglican minister. In 1596 George was sheriff of Oxfordshire, which required conformity; in 1612 he helped Thomas Chamberlain administer the Jacobean Oath of Allegiance to south Oxfordshire recusant gentry, including the Belsons and Powells, in a purge of 'vermin Jesuits'.⁵⁰ Brome may have sought to soften the blow by his presence, but several gentry ladies fled his visit, while others openly refused his Oath.

He had really suffered for his recusancy – four impressionable years in the Tower with and because of his mother, and later summoned before the Privy Council. His cousin Edward spent three years in the Tower after the Babington Plot. The Giffards, connected

⁴⁶ Accusations against Lord Henry Windsor and son for receiving priests (1592): Talbot, *op. cit.* note 7, pp. 123-5; Hugh Hall, a former monk of Bordesley Abbey which had once owned Hewell Grange, admitted in 1583 to having been sheltered at Hewell by the Windsors since 1569: *Cal. S.P. Dom. 1581-90*, 142. In 1588 another old priest, William Bennett, was interrogated about the wedding of Lord Henry Windsor during a Mass: J. Pollen and W. MacMahon (eds.), *Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel* (C.R.S. 21), 164. On priest hides 1587-1606 see M. Hodgetts, 'Elizabethan Priest Holes (I), Dates and Chronology', *Recusant Hist.* 11 (1971-2), 279-98; 'Elizabethan Priest Holes (III), East Anglia, Baddesley Clinton and Hindlip Hall', *Recusant Hist.* 12 (1973-4), 174-84; Norman, *Baddesley Clinton*.

⁴⁷ Foster, *op. cit.* note 14; Ryan, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 65, where 'Gloucester Hall is greatly suspected.' Ducklington was a Brome manor and church, to which Harrison, 'a servant of Sir Christopher Brome', was presented in 1585; ejected from Corpus with Miles Windsor for Catholicism, he had been ordained an Anglican in 1574, but once in Ducklington revealed Roman leanings again: Howard-Drake, *op. cit.* note 24, no. 43; *Alum. Oxon.*; Berry, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 17.

⁴⁸ Caraman, *John Gerard*, 169-70, 246-7, records his visits to Waterperry and to Thame Park; see also *V.C.H. Oxon.* vii, 210-11; P. Caraman, *Henry Garnet* (1964), 98-9, 102, 116. For the plight and responses of Elizabethan recusant gentry, see A. Fraser, *The Gunpowder Plot* (1996), 19-36.

⁴⁹ Berry, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 18.

⁵⁰ Chamberlain to Lord Ellesmere: Petti, *op. cit.* note 8, pp. 208ff.

with George and Henry Ferrers through Baddesley Clinton and marriage, had also been close to the conspiracy. The execution of Thomas Belson and later Robert Southwell may have been final straws, the end of youthful certainties. Swimming against the tide was wearying. George was getting older and the recusancy fines dealt out to his brother Edmund and his sisters Dynham, Horseman and Blount, together with his aunt Windsor of Hewell, would have crippled Holton. Lady Eleanor came dangerously near to doing so. In fact George turned round the Park's finances, bequeathed generously to relatives and staff (including his armourer), surrounded himself with books, had a London house and even travelled out of England, via the Isle of Wight, where a sister had married into the Oglanders. It may have been at this point that Holton 'Castle' was refurbished and a stone bearing the date 1306 was set up as an antiquary's reminder that Holton had once been in royal hands.⁵¹ William, his only son, died aged 10 in 1599 and a brass was laid down to his memory in Holton church, alongside that of the first Brome.

Like his cousin Ferrers, George Brome collected books, including manuscripts salvaged from the Dissolution. They may have compensated for an abandoned university education; books had landed him in trouble in 1586 and they dominated his will of 1605, proved after his death in 1613.⁵² 'Two books of special choice' were left to the university vice-chancellor to convey to the new Bodleian Library. The rest, which lined 'studdys' at Holton and in London, or were in the hands of friends, were all bequeathed to his son-in-law Thomas Whorwood, and then to any grandson the couple might provide. In 1608 Brome gave to the university a 12th-century parchment chronicle saved from the dissolution of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey and bound in 13th- and 14th-century scrap manuscript leaves. His neighbour in Wheatley, Abraham Archdale, with brothers named Cyprian and Vergil, also donated to the 'university library'.⁵³

Evidently George had obeyed his father's last wishes by redeeming plate and jewels from pawn. He passed on to Catherine Dynham of Boarstall, now Fulwood, Sir Christopher's silver bell, and to Elizabeth Horseman his silver-gilt bell. 'Brome bush' signet rings went to his wife Elizabeth, to Ursula and Thomas Whorwood, and to Eleanor Oglander. He also left his watch to an old friend in Oxford, Mr. Justice Williams. Most poignantly George bequeathed to his cousin Leonard Power of Bletchingdon, younger son of Dorothy (née Brome), 'my mother's wedding ring in token of the love which was between my mother and his, and both our families, and in token of the love which is between him and myself'. His executors were his 'trusty and beloved friend' Sir John Curson of Waterperry and his cousin Francis Power.

In 1605 the Gunpowder Plot overshadowed many recusants, however innocent. The Warwickshire Bromes had earlier married into the Catesbys of Lapworth, near Baddesley Clinton. Robert Catesby and his brother studied at Gloucester Hall under Miles Windsor. George Brome composed his will at the end of July 1605 'in good disposition of body and mind' – coincidence or foreboding? Walter Giffard's mother and grandmother were Throckmortons of Coughton. Henry Ferrers sub-let his house up against the Palace of

⁵¹ The worn datestone on the island is omitted from Oxon C.C. Monuments Report, S.A.M. 30823. Between 1294 and 1317 Margaret de Clare, estranged wife of Edmund, earl of Cornwall, held part of Holton in her dower: *V.C.H. Oxon.* v, 170.

⁵² Will of George Brome: P.R.O., PROB 11/122 (P.C.C. 111 Capell).

⁵³ Brome's manuscript donation is recorded in the Bodl. Lib. Benefactors' Register, 1600-88, Library Records b. 903, 426. Sir Thomas Bodley instructed that Brome's details be inscribed on the flyleaf: *Reliquiae Bodleianae*, 174. 'Abraham Archdale de Whately' bequeathed money for 10 books in 1631: Bodl. Benefactors' Reg., 294.

Westminster to Guy Fawkes as caretaker for Percy and Wintour. It was in his cellar that the powder was stored. It was to Hewell Grange at noon on 7 November 1605 that Catesby led the conspirators to demand arms, money and support from the Windsors. Lord Henry, a shield to less prudent recusant relatives, had died that year and his son William, a minor, was away from home. The plotters may have intended to manipulate the boy; perhaps Henry had intimated sympathy before his death; perhaps they assumed too much. They certainly hauled away weapons, powder and a large amount of money. Elizabeth Vaux of Harrowden and Agnes Wenman of Thame Park (distantly related to Brome) were both interrogated and imprisoned over Elizabeth's remark to Agnes that 'Tottenham could soon become French'.⁵⁴ John Gerard and Henry Garnet, old shades of Baddesley Clinton, Thame Park, Waterperry and possibly Holton, were imprisoned in the Tower and Garnet was executed. His journey from Worcester to London in February 1606, under courteous arrest, took him by Holton Park and on to near Bradenham where sickness halted him at High Wycombe. Though Garnet would have known both houses he could never have suggested to his escort that they break their journey at either.⁵⁵ In May 1606, when Garnet was executed, George Brome and Walter Giffard severed all financial connection with Baddesley Clinton.⁵⁶

TWELFTH NIGHT 1630 – THE BROME FINALE

George Brome died in 1613 and was buried 'in Holton parish church within the south-east chapel or aisle where William Brome my ancestor lies interred under a stone'.⁵⁷ His daughter Ursula and Thomas Whorwood were lodging with their widowed aunt, Elizabeth Horseman, in Wheatley (High) Street just prior to George's death.⁵⁸ They inherited Holton Park along with their Brome signets, and named their first child Brome Whorwood. Later Sir Thomas pestered Henry Ferrers at Baddesley Clinton 'every time he comes this way' for a Brome and Whorwood genealogy.⁵⁹ Pedigrees fed more than vanity: they were evidence for land title and Thomas was a litigious man. Elizabeth Horseman would have been included on the family tree when Ferrers eventually completed it, but she probably never saw it. On Friday morning, 31 December 1629, she died at her home opposite Wheatley manor house.⁶⁰

Elizabeth had come to Wheatley a widow after 1600 with her children Mary and George, possibly to reduce the risk of forfeiture of the Horseman family home at Haseley, certainly to be nearer her brother George Brome. She was repeatedly fined and excommunicated for

⁵⁴ Anstruther, *Vaux of Harrowden*, 287, 318.

⁵⁵ Caraman, *Henry Garnet*, 344-5. The Worcester to London road ran via Islip, Wheatley and Stokenchurch to High Wycombe. Bradenham is just over a mile north of where the road enters West Wycombe.

⁵⁶ S.B.T.R.O., DR 3/353.

⁵⁷ P.R.O., PROB 11/122 (P.C.C. 111 Capell, will of George Brome).

⁵⁸ 'A Note of all Communicants in Whateley, 1612/13', in W.O. Hassall (ed.), *Wheatley Records, 956-1956* (Oxon. Rec. Soc. xxxvii, 1956), 47-56, lists High Street residents in house order; J. Fox, 'Wheatley Westgate – Influence, Intrigue and Individuals' (unpubl. TS. 2000).

⁵⁹ S.B.T.R.O., D 241/4/108; Berry, op.cit. note 7, p. 24 n.2.

⁶⁰ This account of the burial of Elizabeth Horseman is based on the archdeaconry court record: Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon c.56, ff. 41-6. On illegal recusant burials, see J. Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570-1850* (1975), 140-2. D. Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (2000), 118-37, considers Mrs. Horseman's burial in detail; while unaware of her Brome background and the main reason for the defiant burial, he suggests that excommunication was a grey area in 1630, not imposed for mere recusancy but only for prominent recusancy which influenced others.

recusancy between 1592 and 1629.⁶¹ Her son George received a legacy of 2s. 6d. from his mother, while Mary, who had married an Anglican clergyman, was in the rectory at Duntisbourne, Gloucestershire, when her mother died.⁶² Relationships between recusants and personnel of the established church were often good – they shared a humanity and a history older than doctrinal disputes. Elizabeth Horseman was nursed in her last illness by Mary, wife of Thomas Whicker, curate of Wheatley, neighbours who lived in the Archdale-owned chapel cottage on the other side of the George Inn. Her maidservant Mary Sleeman (often fined as a recusant after 1600) and Widow Ives from across the street also attended. Mrs. Whicker witnessed Elizabeth's oral will – a Protestant witness always helped matters in the diocesan probate court. The Whickers may also have introduced the young Mary Horseman to John Hampton, her future husband – Whicker and Hampton were Christ Church contemporaries, both 'gentry'. Across the road Abraham Archdale expressed esteem for the Whickers in his will of 1631. The Bromes and Archdales had been recusant neighbours for over 60 years, the Whickers for less, but good neighbours, whatever their differences, meant everything. Rector Price in Holton also showed some sympathy, a Brome retainer and a symbol of stability after 50 years in post – seven ministers had preceded him during the 50 years of the Reformation.

Mrs. Horseman's body was refused burial, because she was excommunicate and no certificate could be produced that 'she died penitent'. Mary Sleeman, however, said she had heard Price 'promise Mistress Horseman in her lifetime that he would bury her'. Most of her family were dead and past pleading her case, but two conflicting principles were being tested: the consistency of penal law, and the rectorial right to be buried in Holton chancel. Wheatley manor house remained silent, although staff there were named in the conspiracy and old Mrs. Archdale had been allowed burial in Cuddesdon church in 1625 after 50 years' recusancy. The Whorwoods also seem to have been silent. Mistress Brome (Edmund's recusant widow Margaret) and Edward Powell, both of Forest Hill, asked for decent burial. Powell offered Rector Price £100 to break the law, even suggesting temporary interment in Mrs. Horseman's back garden, but the body remained unburied until Twelfth Night. Thomas Day, John Robinson of the White Hart at Wheatley, and John Stacey, a neighbour of the Prices, all pressed the rector to conduct the burial. The Holton parish clerk even took the measurement of the coffin from the carpenter after Mary Sleeman measured the body. Despite the pressure, however, Price still refused to act without authority, 'for these were Papists' – Mrs. Brome, Mr. Powell and the late Mrs. Horseman herself. On New Year's morning, the Saturday after Mrs. Horseman's death, Mary Sleeman came to the rector to ask a knell for her mistress. She had his agreement and sent the ringers beer and bread from Mrs. Horseman's kitchen. Rector Price was confined to bed, conveniently but genuinely sick, and a protective Mrs. Price insisted that neither he nor his curate, Howell Lloyd, could bury the body without the archdeacon's certificate. Impasse followed. 'Albeit she was put in a coffin on New Year's Day, by Monday she began to smell so strong that... they drew her corpse into the garden... the company supped there that night, but there being no warrant

⁶¹ Elizabeth Horseman fined 1592-3; Elizabeth Horseman wife of Paul Horseman excommunicated 1600/1; Elizabeth Horseman fined £160 in 1592/3, £280 in 1593/4, £140 in 1603, £100 in 1604, £100 in 1620, £20 in 1624, £60 in 1628 and excommunicated in 1629; Elizabeth Horseman widow and her daughter Mary were indicted as recusants 1604 and 1608; Mary Horseman was fined £160 in 1606 and £80 in 1620, not long before she married; maidservant Mary Sleeman was also fined in 1620. Sources: Calthorpe, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 254; Petti, *op. cit.* note 8, pp. 132-6, 239; 'Oxford Recusants, 1603-1629', *N. Oxon. Arch. Soc.* 13 (1924), 16-58 *passim*.

⁶² Elizabeth Horseman's nuncupative will, 1629; O.R.O., MS Wills Oxon. 31/3/11.

she was not buried... and the next morning drew her into the parlour again... and left her in the garden on Wednesday at night from where she was carried at night and buried in Holton church'.

When the clerk and carpenter came to ring in the Epiphany on Thursday 6 January they found 'belfry and chancel doors unbarred and a grave digged in the chancel, made up again and the [communion] table set upon it'. Brome graves occupied the chancel floor and the family knelt by them every Sunday. The bellringers who had tolled for Elizabeth on Saturday had kept the key they had borrowed. One of them, John Stacey, farmer and next-door neighbour of the rector, had been fined for recusancy three years before. The young, keen archdeacon of Oxford, Nathan Barker, now stepped in, but his court sitting over six months failed to find the culprits, and Rector Price was too frail to be called for questioning. Few of those who did witness 'knew anything', not even Mrs. Horseman's maid. The rector's wife testified to having found Stacey 'at break of day on Twelfth Morning' in dirty boots, but his milkmaid insisted that he had suffered fever and diarrhoea overnight. Joan George, a recusant and daughter-in-law of George Brome's gardener, heard the news in Magdalen Wood on her way back from Oxford market, and exclaimed, 'God bless the hearts of those who buried the dead. It is fit the dead should be buried'. Stacey, Day, innkeeper Robinson and Richard Winslow, a Wheatley labourer, were excommunicated in August, all suitably lowly scapegoats. In November after public penance the four were accepted back into church.

In 1530, Baron Andrew Windsor took on a role of absolute obedience in the Reformation Parliament, pressing the Pope on the King's behalf. In 1630, Oxfordshire villagers disobeyed Crown and church on behalf of his very disobedient great-granddaughter, the last of her recusant family. Such local loyalty, like that of graduates and lawyers within their fraternities, could protect and cushion recusants from Elizabethan penal law. Through the Windsor connection the Bromes of Holton became notable recusants in their own right during Elizabeth's reign, to some extent involved in crucial national events. The same connection also brought significant marital, recusant and financial ties with the Ferrerses of Baddesley Clinton, their ancestral seat. Henry Ferrers seems to have been a more active recusant than has been realised and his and George Brome's link with the Giffards may be significant given the accusations surrounding the Babington-Giffard Plot. Unfortunately the demolition of Holton Hall prevents speculation about the stylistic influence of one antiquary's home on another just when Henry Ferrers was re-creating Baddesley Clinton and George Brome was monitoring his spending.

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