

THE HOBYS OF EVESHAM, AND OF BISHAM (BERKS)

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The ample fortunes of the Hoby family appear to have been founded by William Hoby, of Leominster, co. Hereford, a man of obscure origin. He married twice, his first wife being Catherine Foster, by whom he had three surviving children: William (b. c. 1500), Philip (b. 1505)—who, as Sir Philip, became so particularly associated with Evesham and the neighbourhood—and Magdalen (b. 1519), with similar associations; his second wife was Catherine Fordun, their children being Thomas (b. 1530), Richard (b. c. 1532), and Elizabeth, who died married in 1551.

The aforesaid William was also well-known in that locality, for he lived for many years at Hailes¹, near Winchcombe, in which property, formerly Cistercian, he had become interested through his marriage with Alice Hodgkins, whose father had also obtained other Abbey lands in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. William Hoby died at the age of 103, it being then recorded of him that he was "a man unlearned, very just and very plain in his actions, and of great hospitality." He is said to have restored the delightfully situated little parish church at Hailes, and there he was buried in 1603, where, at least in these days, there is no monument of him.

Richard Hoby also aforesaid, a half-brother of Sir Philip's, lived for many years at Badsey, some two miles from Evesham, and died there in 1616. He had held the manor of Badsey, with which Sir Philip had also been concerned, for a short time—1598 to 1600—and probably retained property in the parish until his death. His monument is still to be seen against the north wall of the chancel of the parish church there, with him and his wife, Margaret (*née* Newman), kneeling at a desk under an entablature carried by columns. Above are the Hoby arms, and on the base of the monument are figures of two sons and one daughter. The figure of Margaret Hoby is much damaged.

¹ W. St. C. Baddeley: *A Cotteswold Shrine*, Chap. XV, with pedigree of Hoby.

Philip Hoby, who married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Walter Stonor, of Wyrardisbury, amongst other local properties became possessed of the site and buildings of the great Benedictine Abbey of Our Lady and St. Ecgwin at Evesham, for which he had been an early bargainer, and which cost him £891 10s. This was in 1542, at which time Hoby was already deeply concerned in diplomatic affairs. In 1544 he was knighted after the siege and fall of Boulogne, and later on became English Ambassador at the Court of the Emperor Charles V.

It is certain that Sir Philip was accustomed often to stay at Evesham, and it seemed possible that he was accustomed to reside at the Abbey Gatehouse, which had remained more or less untouched for some considerable time after the Dissolution. However, there is now definite evidence¹ that he made the still-existing and adjacent Abbey Almonry his headquarters when actually in the town.

It was not from the Almonry, however, but from London that he wrote—probably in 1541, the year is not given—to the notorious John Scudamore, one of the King's Commissioners, a letter which is still in existence², and which shows the spirit in which he had entered upon his purchase. He says, and he is here modernized:—

“After my right hearty commendations had, where at my last communication had with you I desired you that I might have had some part of the stone that should be sold at Evesham for my money the principal and best whereof, as I am informed, is sold—yet forasmuch as my necessity which shall shortly happen in building will require a great part of that stone that is unsold there, this shall be therefore most heartily to desire and pray you that you will sell me the residue that there remaineth, and I will pay therefor even as you shall think reasonable.

“And if you should not show me this pleasure, I were like in time of my necessity to be very destitute; and as concerning the spoil or waste that you wrote to me of that hath been done there, I assure you both I and mine be guiltless thereof, besides that it did cost me money to persons for a long time nightly to watch and take heed lest anything should be mis-ordered there.

¹ Barnard: *Trans.* Worcs Arch. Soc., Vol. V, p. 58.

² Cf. May, *op. cit.*, pp. 145 and 432.

"I trust also that at your there being, and others the King's Highness's Commissioners, you will remember that there was no little spoil made, and I promise you since your departure therehence there hath been nothing minished to my knowledge; and if it be so, I would the offenders were punished to the example of others. Thus I will leave off writing to you any more at this time, trusting that we shall meet shortly. . . .

"Written at the Court, the last of October,

Your loving friend,

Philip Hoby."

He had at this time a particular interest in the hamlet of Aldington, in the parish of Badsey, and it is very probable that his "necessity which shall shortly happen in building" must refer to the additions that he was making to his manor-house there. This suggestion derives support from the following reference made in the late A. H. Savory's *Grain and Chaff from an English Manor*, published in 1920. Mr. Savory lived at Aldington Manor for many years, of which he says:—

"The Manor remained in the hands of the Hoby family for many years, and was one of Sir Philip's principal seats. Freestone from the Abbey seems to have been largely used for additions made in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, for in some alterations I made about 1888, I found many carved and moulded stones, built into the walls, evidently the remains of arches from an ecclesiastical building, and Sir Philip Hoby is known to have treated the Abbey ruins as if they were nothing better than a stone quarry."

The Town Hall at Evesham undoubtedly is partly built of stones brought from the adjacent Abbey site, and incidentally serves as a memorial to the Hoby family, although not to Sir Philip, who had died probably some twenty years before it was erected. Concerning it Thomas Habington, in his *Survey of Worcestershire*, says that it was erected by "one of the Hobys," doubtless Sir Edward, nephew and heir of Sir Philip, by the death of Sir Thomas, his father, to the Abbey site and demesne, as well as to the greater part of the little town of that period.

Philip and Elizabeth Hoby had also, on 19 March, 1539-40, received from Henry VIII the grant of the manor of Offenham,

two miles from Evesham. It would seem probable that this manor had been held by the Abbot and Convent of Evesham from the time of the dedication of the Abbey in 709 until the Dissolution, when it had passed into the hands of the Crown. It remained in the Hoby family until 1583, when it came to Thomas Cecil, son of the aftermentioned Cecil, and soon afterwards to the Haselwoods. They retained an interest in Offenham for many years, and the Worcestershire Hearth Tax Returns¹ for 1667-8 show that the manor-house, which stood on and about the site now occupied by the farmhouse of Court Farm, was then in the possession of Francis Haselwood, gentleman, and was returned as having twelve hearths. In an earlier return, c. 1662, it had possessed sixteen, of which four are returned as having been "burnt down."

The farmhouse in question, says George May in his *History of Evesham* (2nd edition), published in 1845, "seems to have been constructed out of the remains of the former; and in digging, during the summer of 1843, in the yard adjoining, extensive foundations, together with fragments of mullions and doorways, were found. Great part of the moat that extended round the mansion may still be clearly traced."

Recently, in going through the references under letter "U" in a volume of the State Papers Domestic, at the Public Record Office, I chanced to notice 'Uffnam,' which had evidently nonplussed the responsible authority, and had been left thus. To us of South Worcestershire, however, it still represents one way of pronouncing 'Offenham,' and as such it has existed for at least one thousand years². So, following up the reference, it has been a pleasing reward to find that it is represented by a holograph letter written from Offenham in 1552 by Sir Philip to the great little William Cecil, at that time Secretary of State to Edward VI.

This letter³, which is also modernized, and has not before been printed, is typical of Sir Philip, a delightful correspondent⁴ who excelled in the variety of his spelling, even in those unregulated days, and always dealt heavily in aspirates. He is thanking Cecil for his interest in obtaining for him the manor of Bisham, which had been granted by Henry VIII

¹ P.R.O. : Subsidies, 201/312.

² Kemble's *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*.

³ S.P. Dom. Edward VI, 10/15.

⁴ E.g., his letters in *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Gresham*. J. W. Burgoyne (1839).