

QUEEN ELIZABETH I IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

by Russell Howes

Queen Elizabeth I is famous for her progresses, when she visited the country houses of her noblemen and the towns of her more humble subjects. She travelled nearly every year in the summer months until the last year of her long reign. Only in the 1580s, with catholic plots at home and the threat of war with Spain, did she remain in or near London.¹

The Queen came to Gloucestershire on three occasions. The first was in 1574.² She left Richmond palace on 3 July, passed through Windsor, and stayed for a few days at the royal manor of Woodstock. From there she moved into Gloucestershire to Sudeley castle. This was the seat of Giles Bridges, Lord Chandos, a young man who had succeeded his father the previous year. The title had been first bestowed by Queen Mary on Giles's grandfather, Sir John Bridges, who was member for Gloucestershire in Henry VIII's parliaments, and as constable of the Tower of London had helped Mary suppress the rebellion of Sir Thomas Wyatt. Lord Chandos was the principal nobleman in Gloucestershire, and often served as lord lieutenant; for the Berkeley family was under a cloud. At Sudeley castle today can be seen a painting attributed to Lucas de Heere of Henry VIII and his son and two daughters (another version is at Hampton Court), and a portrait of Elizabeth I, said to be by Zuccaro; but these paintings came to Sudeley when the castle was restored in the nineteenth century.³



King Henry VIII and his Family, attributed to Lucas de Heere. c.1565-70. At Sudeley Castle. National Museum of Wales

Members of the Privy Council travelled with the Queen, and the records of their meetings help to establish her route. There was a council meeting at Sudeley on 5 August when eight councillors were present, including Lord Burghley the lord treasurer, the two brothers the earls of Warwick and Leicester, and Lord Clinton the lord admiral, whose daughter Frances was the wife of Lord Chandos. Even at this date there was anxiety about attack by Spain. A man was sent to Portsmouth to 'discover the coming of the Spanish fleet'. Admiral Sir William Winter of Lydney was in the Isle of Sheppey seeking the best place to fortify and recommended Queenborough.⁴



King Henry and his Family, artist unknown, c.1546. At Hampton Court

Queen and court moved next to Gloucester. The city chamberlains recorded the expenses of the occasion.⁵ First there was a gift to the Queen: a cup double gilt, worth £26 11s. 4d, and inside it £40 in gold. There were several gifts to officers and servants of the royal household, as porters, coachmen (suggesting that the Queen travelled by coach) and waymaster. One group of servants was called the black guard; these were probably menials of the kitchen who had charge of pots and pans on journeys.⁶

There was evidently much music to celebrate the Queen's visit. She brought trumpeters, musicians and waits (another word for musicians); Lord Leicester had trumpeters and musicians. Gloucester paid 'the waytes of Shresburie for plaienge aboute the citie everie morininge as longe as the Quenes Grace was here'. A few years later Gloucester had its own waits, who played in the streets at four in the morning; these were poor almsmen who did this in return for their maintenance.⁷ A typically Tudor gift of a sugar loaf was made to the lord treasurer. It is uncertain where the Queen stayed; possibly she stayed with the bishop of Gloucester, just as Henry VIII had stayed at the abbey nearly forty years earlier.

After she left Gloucester the Queen stayed at Frocester. This was a significant event for a small village, and was recorded (in Latin) in the parish register: 'On the day of the feast of St. Lawrence [10 August] in this year, 1574, our most serene queen Elizabeth came into this our town, and lodged in it that night at the seat of George Huntley, esq.; by whom she was elegantly and splendidly entertained; afterwards she went to Berkeley Castle'.⁸ Frocester Court had belonged to St. Peter's abbey, Gloucester; it was purchased by George Huntley in 1554. An inventory made in 1628, some fifty years after Queen Elizabeth's visit, named one of the rooms 'the Queens Chamber'.⁹

The Queen was brought to Berkeley castle at the insistence of the earl of Leicester. The Berkeley family had for more than 150 years been involved in a disputed inheritance which clouded its relations with the Queen. There were two points at issue. In 1492 William Marquis Berkeley died, and bequeathed all his property to King Henry VII and his male heirs. When King Edward VI died Queen Mary was obliged to restore the lands, castle and title to Henry Lord Berkeley. In 1417 Thomas IV Lord Berkeley died, leaving only a daughter Elizabeth. Henry Lord Berkeley was descended in the male line from Thomas IV's brother. The claim in the female line

had passed to the earl of Warwick, brother to the earl of Leicester, Elizabeth I's most favoured courtier. The earl of Leicester had obtained a legal judgement in 1572, upholding his right to some of the Berkeley property. Besides all this Lord Berkeley's wife Katherine was sister of the duke of Norfolk, who was executed for conspiracy in 1572.

In 1574 Leicester wished to exert his family's authority at Berkeley castle. He arranged a hunt in the deer park, and 27 stags were killed. Lord Berkeley was not there, but at his house at Callowden near Coventry. In his anger he prepared to have the grounds disparked. But he was warned that he would antagonise Leicester and the Queen still further. The city of Gloucester after the Queen's visit received a gift from her of red deer, which is what Lord Berkeley kept in his park.¹⁰

From these scenes of animosity the Queen passed on to Bristol, where she was welcomed with celebrations. There were speeches in verse at the High Cross and a mock battle at the Fort. The Queen arrived back at Hampton Court in October.

The progress of Elizabeth I in 1575 was the longest in duration and the most famous. This was when she was lavishly entertained at Kenilworth castle by the earl of Leicester. She stayed 17 days. During her onward progress she stayed briefly at Sudeley castle. Little is known of this visit, except the record of a meeting at Sudeley of the Privy Council, which took action against six stubborn catholic recusants of Staffordshire. The Queen returned through Oxfordshire, reaching Hampton Court just before Christmas.¹¹

After the defeat of the Spanish Armada, although the war was far from over, and soldiers from England (and Gloucestershire) were required for service in France, the Netherlands and Ireland, the Queen resumed her progresses. In 1592 she set out from Nonesuch palace at the beginning of August, came through Newbury, and entered Gloucestershire at Down Ampney. Details of her progress in Gloucestershire were recorded in a letter book of Gloucester city council.¹² She was formally received by Giles Lord Chandos, lord lieutenant, and Sir John Poyntz, high sheriff, at a meadow in Driffild near the highway from Cricklade. Lines of horsemen in silk breeches and doublets were drawn up. These attended the Queen to Cirencester. At the entrance to the town she was presented with a cup double gilt worth £20 given by the town of Cirencester, and welcomed with a Latin oration. She stayed at the new house of Sir John Danvers; this was on the site of the later house and grounds of Cirencester Park.

The Queen and court were four days at Cirencester. There was plague in London that summer – an additional reason for the Queen to go into the country. The Privy Council meeting at Cirencester was concerned to prevent the disease from spreading. Martin Frobisher and a number of ships were expected at Portsmouth; if merchants from London went there to buy commodities it was feared that they would spread infection. All merchants (and not only from London) were forbidden to enter Portsmouth.¹³

The royal party moved on towards Sudeley, but were constrained by high winds to make an unplanned halt at Rendcomb. On her journey the Queen dined in John Cotton's house at Whittington Court. She reached Sudeley by Saturday 9 September.

A book was produced, presumably at the behest of Lord Chandos, describing the entertainment at Sudeley.¹⁴ Shows and speeches greeted the Queen. At her entrance to the castle an old shepherd addressed her. 'Your highness is come into Cotswold . . . these hills afford nothing but cottages, and nothing can we present to your highness but shepherds.' He concluded by offering the Queen a lock of wool which, he said, was white, the colour of virginity. On Sunday the Queen saw Apollo running after Daphne; they were pursued by a shepherd who complained that Apollo pursued his Daphne. Daphne appealed to the Queen: 'whither should Chastity fly but to the Queen of Chastity?' On the third day the entertainment suffered the fate of many another English summer entertainment. 'The High Constable of Cotswold' (no official post) should have been presented to the Queen, 'but the weather was so unfit that he was not'.

Five gentlemen were made knights by the Queen at Sudeley. They included Sir Henry Bromley of Worcestershire and Sir John Newton of Barr's Court near Bristol. Sir John Higford was lord of the manor of

Alderton and Dixton; it is not clear whether the Queen visited him at Dixton, which is not far from Sudeley. The other two had taken part in local defence against the Spanish armada, and perhaps owed their knighthood to this. Sir Thomas Lucy of Highnam had commanded the horsemen provided by the city of Gloucester for the county trained band. He was the son of



of Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote in Warwickshire. The elder Lucy was said to have been the original of Shakespeare's Justice Shallow, who joined Falstaff recruiting soldiers in a scene set in Gloucestershire. The other new made knight was Sir Henry Winston of Standish, one of the commanders of the county troops in 1588.¹⁵ At Sudeley the Privy Council, continuing its concern about the plague, tried to stop the unhealthy gaols of London from being overcrowded with prisoners for debt.¹⁶

The Queen began her return journey through Sherborne, where she stayed with John Dutton, and Northleach, where she dined with a Mr. Parker. She continued through Witney and Burford.

In Oxfordshire a splendid entertainment was given to the Queen by Sir Henry Lee, either at his own house at Ditchley, or at the royal manor of Woodstock. Sir Henry had offended the Queen by leaving court, and going to live in the country with his mistress, Anne Vavasour; he was trying to win back royal favour. The 'Ditchley' portrait of Elizabeth I attributed to Marcus Gheerhaerts the younger is thought to date from now. It shows the Queen standing on a map of England, with her feet on Oxfordshire. Above the portrait are two scenes, one a stormy sky representing the Queen's displeasure, the other sunshine representing her renewed favour. This portrait commemorates the year of Queen Elizabeth I's last visit to Gloucestershire.

Queen Elizabeth I, the 'Ditchley' portrait, attributed to Marcus Gheerhaerts the younger, c.1592. National Portrait Gallery, London

References

¹ John Nichols, *The Progresses of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 volumes, (1823).

² Nichols, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 391-92; Emma Dent, *The Annals of Winchcombe and Sudeley* (1877), p. 223.

³ The composition of the painting Henry VIII and his Family seems to be inspired by a similar painting by an unknown artist at the end of that king's reign and now at Hampton Court. Emma Dent in *The Annals of Winchcombe and Sudeley* attributed the painting to Sir Antonio Moro, but he was in England only briefly at the beginning of Queen Mary's reign. Dent explained that the painting was in Horace Walpole's collection, and was bought by John Coucher Dent at the Strawberry Hill sale about 1842. Another painter, Hans Eworth, is sometimes confused with Lucas de Heere because they used similar monograms. There were two brothers Zuccaro: the elder, Tadeo, died in 1566; Federico was in England in 1573-74. Ellis Waterhouse in *Painting in Britain 1530-1790 (Pelican History of Art)* (1953) wrote, 'His name, taken in vain, is to be found on the labels in most of the great houses of England'.

⁴ *Acts of the Privy Council (APC) 1571-75*, pp. 280-82.

⁵ Gloucestershire Record Office (GRO), GBR F 4/3, ff 160v-161; Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC), *Twelfth Report, Appendix, Part IX, Records of the Corporation of Gloucester*, pp. 470-71.

⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, 'blackguard'.

⁷ GRO, GBR B 3/1, f. 157v

⁸ GRO, P 153 IN 1/1; Samuel Rudder, *A New History of Gloucestershire*, p. 457.

⁹ GRO, D340a/F19/1.

¹⁰ John Smyth, *The Lives of the Berkeleys*, vol. II, p. 378; John Smyth placed this incident in the fifteenth year of Queen Elizabeth, i.e. 1572-73, but it seems clear that her only visit to Berkeley was in 1574; following Smyth, Nichols placed the visit to Berkeley in 1572; GRO, GBR B3/1, f. 43v.

¹¹ Nichols, op. cit., vol. I, p. 543; Dent, op. cit., pp. 223-24; *APC 1575-77*, p. 13.

¹² GRO, GBR H2/1, f. 62.

¹³ *APC 1592*, pp. 177-78.

¹⁴ Nichols, op. cit., vol. III, pp. 129, 217-19; Dent, op. cit., pp. 226-38; *Speeches Delivered to Queen Elizabeth . . . at Sudeley Castle in Gloucestershire*, with preface by Sir Egerton Brydges (1815), which reprinted 'Speeches delivered to Her Majesty this last Progress at . . . Bissam . . . Sudeley . . . Ricott. At Oxford, printed by Joseph Barnes, 1592'.

¹⁵ GRO, H2/1, ff. 4, 62.

¹⁶ *APC 1592*, pp. 183-84.