

Hugh Sexey (1556–1619)

BY J. H. ALDERSON

Two of the citizens of Bruton cut some figure at the Court of Queen Elizabeth. Of one of them, named Powell, *The Times* some years ago published a request for information. It is with the other, a certain Hugh Sexey, or Saxey, that we are concerned. For information about his youth we have little to guide us beyond tradition, which has it that he was a shepherd's boy; that he aroused the interest of a gentleman, who rode past his flock on the hills, by answering in Latin a question he asked him; that the said gentleman sent him to the local Grammar School, and perhaps from that to Merchant Taylors.

The Bruton Parish Registers record that on 18 November 1556 Hugh — was baptized, no explanation being given of the absence of a surname. Thirteen years later Hugh Sexey was buying land in Gloucestershire. If the two are identical, he must have been a case of 'Baptism of such as are of Riper Years'.

Documentary evidence begins when he is established in London, living in Redcross Street, and apparently a qualified lawyer, as in 1572 he was acting for a Thomas Hanbury.

The 6th day of May in the 26th year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth—'Hughe Sexey Attorney unto Thomas Hanbury Esquier and by him auctorized was at the place of her Majesty's Receipte of Exchequire at Westminster betwixte the houers of 6.0 and 7.0 of the clocke in the afternone of the same day and there did tarrye and abide untill the sonne was sette and did then & there demande the halfe yere's rent of the parsonages of Worle & Kewstocke in the countie of Somerset dewe unto the sayde Thomas Hanbury at Ladye-Daye last paste which demande was made as aforesaide in the presence of us whose names are underwrytten.'

In 1583 he was appointed by Edward Barkley 'his true and lawful attorney' to receive the rent of a Priory in Cornwall, for other business, and Deputy to him as Auditor to the

Diocese of Bath and Wells. In 1577 he began to acquire property in the Bruton district with a 38 years' lease in Wyke Champflower from Richard Fitz James. His dealings in land, by way both of acquisition and disposal, continued till 1618, and at the time of his death in 1619 a lease he had granted awaited his signature, and gave his widow Ursula *née* Champernoun an excuse to claim the fine. But until 1594 they were concerned for the most part with land outside his native county of Somerset—in Gloucestershire largely, in Wales, in Wiltshire and in Middlesex.

In 1594 he started to acquire tenements in Bruton itself, and by 1598 his estates were important enough to justify the appointment of two attorneys to deal with them.

1613-14 he bought from John Fitz James 'the Manor or lordship of Bruton'. He seems to have enjoyed some favour at Court, as in 1592 he was granted by Elizabeth a lease of land in Gloucestershire. This, if favour there was, was followed in 1599 by his appointment as one of the Royal Auditors. In the same year he was elected a Governor of the Grammar School at Bruton.

He married twice. All that is known of his first wife is derived from a deed of his drawn up in 1613, in which he confirmed and increased an endowment of a charity made in her will. Her name was Dorothy (Fletcher?), and she came from Otley in Yorkshire. The endowment was a sum of £20, to which his deed added £10; to be lent to 4 poor young men at 5 per cent. interest, to enable them to set up in business. The interest was to be divided between 20 poor women at 1s. a head, the Clerk 2s., and the Preacher 8s. at the annual service to be held in Otley Church on 7 April or the next Sunday. The first pair of young men to benefit were Christopher and Laurence Fletcher described as 'of the nearest kindred to' Dorothy. This description coupled with the condition that their loan was for ten years, while to the other two, and always thereafter, it was for one year, seems to suggest that they were Dorothy's brothers, and that she was of humble birth. A further sum of £10 was to be used in wedding gifts for 10 poor brides.

The Otley registers contain no record of her marriage, or burial, but the charity she founded in the name of Dorothy

Saxey still exists as part of another called Plum Tree Garth, the whole being now administered by the Charity Commissioners. We seem to have in this the germ of the idea, which eventually was realized in Hugh Sexey's Hospital.

In 1611 he married again, this time at Cloford, Somerset, Ursula, a daughter of Gawen Champernoun. In 1619 he died.

Before his death he had arranged two important matters.

1. The establishment in houses on the north side of Bruton High Street of poor people, together with the payment of pensions to others, who were not so established.
2. The conveyance in 1617 to a body of Trustees of his landed property 'upon trust and confidence to have and to hold to no other intent and purpose that is to say to the use and behoof of the said Hugh Sexey and the heires of his body lawfully to be begotten and for default of such heires of such persons as Hugh Sexey shall in his last will and testament nominate and in default of such nomination they shall employ the profits in such charitable and good uses as they or the greater number of them should sett down lymitt nominate and appoint. And also that £20 by the yeare should be settled forever for the perpetual maintenance and repairs of the fabricke of the great Church of Bath. And also that a worcking house shald be erected for the maintenance and setting to worcke of poor children and orphans between the age of seven years and thirteen and then to be bound apprentices. This workinge house to be as well for girls as boys.'

On 21 August 1619 his will was proved by his widow Ursula. To Thomas and Anne Bancke he left £140: to be divided among the rest of his kindred equally £500: to his cozen George Ottley £400. 'All the rest of my goods and chattles I give to my dear wife Ursula Sexey whom I make executrix of this my last will and testament and doe also further give and appoint unto her my Mannor of Blackford for and during her naturall life.'

Suits in Chancery with the object of upsetting this will lasted till 1624.

1. His widow Ursula, who had married Sir Garrard Sammes,

claimed £100, fine paid by Widow Lyminge for a 99 years' lease granted her, but not signed by Sexey before his death.

2. His cousin Anne Bancke, supported by her husband, declared that in the original will they and their children were residuary legatees, but that Ursula had drawn up a fresh will, got Hugh's consent to it, when he was at the point of death, and guided his hand to sign it.

The photostat copy in our possession is only initialled.

3. A Bruton butcher, Thomas Andrewes, also claimed to be the heir. The feoffees successfully resisted all these claims, declaring, among other things, that Sexey showed no concern for his widow, and that they had persuaded him to increase her small marriage jointure. So to his widow Ursula went 'all the rest of my goods and chattles and my Mannor of Blackford for and during her naturall life'.

The feoffees then sold much of the outlying property in order to accumulate funds for building, as they found the hospital erected by Hugh Sexey on the north side of Bruton High Street to be 'rotten'. In 1632 they moved the inmates over to the new hospital they had built on the south side, and let the rooms in the old building to tenants. The first inmates of the new building were 12 poor men and women. As funds allowed the 'worckinge house' or school was added, but only boys were admitted. The Deed of Incorporation was dated 1638.

When the system of apprenticeship faded out, the provisions of the trust were complied with by substituting a domestic training school for girls. When this in turn became obsolete, the Charity Commissioners changed the educational obligations into annual grants to schools in the neighbourhood, the space thus saved in the hospital being made available for more 'poor men and women'.

As in the case of Dorothy Saxey's charity, the Deed of Incorporation laid it down, that on Wednesday or some other day in Whitson weeke the Visitors—or five of them at the least—shall attend at Bruton to pass the accounts of the hospital revenues and disbursements, and to hear in Bruton Church a sermon in remembrance of Hugh Sexey, for which the preacher

shall receive 13s. 4*d*. This meeting is now held in the first week of October following a service in the hospital chapel. It is known that Sexey had a house in Bruton. An attempt has been made to identify this with the Town Mill, standing on 'the north side of the west end of the High Street'. To this theory there are two strong objections.

1. In 1597 Sexey conveyed to John Hodgkinson 'the house and watermill at the west end and north side of the High Street' for the remainder of a 99 years' lease originally granted by a Barkley in 1596.
2. 1605 Sexey granted to William, Alice and William Clarke, a holding for 3 lives in Bruton, retaining for himself and his household the right of entry to the backside of the premises in order to dig a well 'neare unto the well commonly called Wyne's well', and to take water to his 'new Bruton House'.

This condition could hardly have been necessary if his house had been a watermill.

In the absence of evidence of the site of the house or of Wyne's well the most likely building would seem to be the house next below the hospital, judging from the similarity of style in both buildings and gardens.

1729-43 the story of Sexey's will was repeated by proceedings before the Lord Chancellor about the will of John Walter of Abbascome, who left, after a trust for two lives, his property to Sexey's Hospital.