

## THREE NOTES ON BIDSTON AND THE STANLEYS.

Contributed by E. B. Goodacre.

## I.

IN Chapter IV of his "History of the old Parish of Bidston, Cheshire" (Hist. Soc. of L. & C., Vol. 87, p. 178), Mr. Brownbill says that, "so far as appears from the surviving records, the Stanleys saw little of Bidston except when they came to hunt there." This statement is not wholly true of the period to which it is related by its context.

Bidston was settled on Henry Lord Strange and his wife Lady Margaret on their marriage in 1555, as related in the Star Chamber bill quoted later. That they made Bidston their home appears from an interesting document, listed as "Declaration by Mrs. Calhill in answer to the accusations of Lord Strange," printed in the *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series*, Addenda 1566-79, and assigned to November, 1567. This document opens with the following passage:

"Lady Strange having sent two messengers to me in Ireland to come over and enter her service, and my husband being departed, I came to Bristol" [*sic*; should be Bidston ("Beidstone"); the fact that this word was misread when the document was being transcribed for the printed calendar is no doubt responsible for this particular reference to Bidston having hitherto been overlooked] "where she resided, and after much persuasion agreed to serve her. . . . Soon after she removed to Knowsley, determining to be brought to bed there. . . . At her delivery, I employed many of my own things to her use; and after churching she came to London to do her duty to her Majesty in the first year of her reign, and lay at one Kellat's in Westminster. . . ."

This shows that, at any rate during the first few years of their married life, say from 1555 to 1558, Lord and

Lady Strange lived at Bidston. Presumably the son born at Knowsley in 1558 or 1559 was either Edward, her first-born, who died in infancy, or Ferdinando. For some years between 1559 and 1567, and certainly during the latter part of this period, Gaddesdon, in Hertfordshire, was their residence, for a letter from Lady Strange to Sir William Cecil, slightly earlier in date than the document quoted above but printed in the same volume, makes it clear that Gaddesdon was the scene of the final rupture between Lord Strange and his wife.

It is highly probable that the remainder of Lady Strange's life was spent in London and that Lord Strange's association with Mistress Dorothy Halsall began about this period. Unless he returned to reside there himself, Bidston may have remained untenanted by a Stanley until after the marriage of Ferdinando, one of whose letters (copied from the Farrington MSS. by Raines), written at the time of the Armada, conveys the impression that Bidston was the house he normally occupied until his succession to the earldom; much of Ferdinando's life was, however, spent at court.

From the expiry of the 21 years' lease of Bidston granted shortly after the death of the Countess Margaret, i.e. from 1617 onwards, William, the 6th Earl, seems to have adopted Bidston as a summer residence until his final retirement to Chester some ten years later.

## II.

The deer in Bidston Park were an important element in the litigation over Bidston at the turn of the century. They were also the subject of the following picturesque complaint made before the Court of Star Chamber by Lady Margaret, Dowager Countess of Derby, in 1596, less than eight months before her death. One thing made clear by this narrative is that at that date the deer-park was surrounded by a wooden fence, so that the " Penny-a-day

Dyke" referred to by Mr. Brownbill, p. 177, must belong to a later age.

STAR CHAMBER 5, D/12/19.

(Indexed at the Public Record Office as: *Margaret, Countess of Derby v. Edw. Ravenscroft, John Herbnell et al.*)

*Bill of Complaint*

(dated 29 Jan., 38 Eliz., i.e. 1596)

*To the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty*

In most humble wise complaining sheweth unto your most excellent Majesty your true, faithful and obedient servant the Right Honourable the Lady Margaret, Countess of Derby, late wife of the Right Honourable Henry, late Earl of Derby deceased; That whereas the Right Honourable Edward Earl of Derby deceased, late father of the said Earl Henry, was in his lifetime lawfully seised in his demesne as of fee (amongst divers other signories, lordships, lands, tenements and hereditaments) of & in the lordship or manor of Bidston with the appurtenances in the co. of Chester, and of & in the park called Bidston park, lying and being within the said manor or lordship of Bidston, which said park & ground time whereof the memory of man is not to the contrary is & hath been a park & so used & enjoyed by all the time aforesaid; And the said Edward late Earl of Derby so being thereof seised did by good & sufficient conveyance & assurance in the law duly, lawfully & sufficiently had, made & executed in or about the 3rd & 4th years [*i.e.* 1556-7] of the reign of the late king & queen of England, King Philip & Queen Mary, grant, convey & assure the said manor & lordship of Bidston & the appurtenances & the park called Bidston park (amongst divers other things) to certain feoffees in the said conveyance named & their heirs to the only use & behoof of the said Henry, late Earl of Derby, by the name of Henry Stanley, Lord Strange, & your said subject, for & during their lives & the longer liver of them, & after their deceases then to the use & behoof of the heirs male of the body of the said Henry late Earl of Derby begotten by the name of Henry Lord Strange upon the body of your said subject, and for default of such issue then to the use & behoof of the said Edward late Earl of Derby & the heirs male of his body lawfully begotten, the remainder thereof to the right heirs of the said Edward Earl of Derby forever;

By force whereof, & of the statute made at Westminster in the co. of Middlesex 4th Feb. 27 Hen. VIII for transferring of

uses into possession had & provided, the said Henry late Earl of Derby & your said subject were lawfully seised of the said manor or lordship of Bidston & park of Bidston (amongst other things) in their demesne as of freehold for term of the life of your said subject as in the right of your said subject, & the said late Earl, then Lord Strange, in his demesne as of the tail, that is to say to him & the heirs male of the body of the said Henry Earl of Derby, then Lord Strange, lawfully begotten upon the body of your said subject, the remainders over as aforesaid; And afterwards the said Henry late Earl of Derby in or about two years now last past died of the said manor & other the premises (amongst other things) of such estate seised as is aforesaid; And your said subject him survived & held herself in the premises per jus accrescendi (*i.e. right of survivorship*) & was & yet is thereof lawfully seised in her demesne as of freehold for the term of her natural life, & the rents, issues, profits & commodities thereof coming, arising & growing sithence the death of the said Henry late Earl of Derby hath perceived, received & taken by herself, her officers, farmers, undertenants & underoccupiers thereof until now of late, that is to say in or about the beginning of the month of August last past;

That so it is (if it may please your most excellent Majesty) that one Edward Ravenscroft of Prenton in the co. of Chester gent., John Hocknell & Henry Hocknell gent., Nicholas Millar & Thomas Woodburne of Prenton aforesaid, being all or most of them men of very evil disposition & behaviour, having unlawfully combined, conspired & confederated themselves together to & with divers other persons to your said subject as yet unknown how & in what sort to vex, disturb, disquiet & interrupt your said subject her lawful & quiet possession & occupation of the said manor & park of Bidston, & how & in what manner to hunt, kill, despoil, steal & carry away your said subject her deer & game being within the said park of Bidston; In or about the said month of August last past & at divers & sundry other times before and sithence, & sithence your Majesty's last most gracious free & general pardon, have in very riotous, routous, forcible, disordered & unlawful manner broken & entered into the said manor of Bidston & park of Bidston aforesaid in divers parts & places thereof, & in like riotous, disordered & unlawful manner have hunted, killed & despoiled your subject's said game & deer lying & being within the said manor & park of Bidston;

Whereof the said E.R. & J.H., H.H., N.M. & T.W. & other

the persons aforesaid, having divers & sundry times had friendly admonition & warning by William Fells your said subject's servant & officer & bailiff of the said manor & by divers others on your subject's behalf, & having been in friendly manner sundry times requested to desist & give over the said misdemeanours & abuses against your said subject her said park & deer; Nevertheless the said E.R. & other the defendants before named not being herewith satisfied & contented but still persisting & continuing the said malicious & wicked misdemeanours & abuses towards your said subject her said park & deer, did in or about the beginning of the month of September last past, & sithence your Majesty's last most gracious general pardon, combine, conspire & confederate themselves together how & in what sort to make a general spoil & killing of your said subjects deer within the said park of Bidston, & understanding that the said William Fells, your subject's bailiff of the said manor & keeper of the said park was here at London in attending your subject's affairs, & that they might effect & bring to pass the said intended purpose without let or controlment, did conspire, complot & devise that the said N.M., one of the said defendants beforenamed should go unto the said park & let go two brace of dogs or greyhounds in or into the said park amongst the said deer; And that if the said dogs should be taken up, or the said N.M. stayed or interrupted in his said intended unlawful purpose, that then the said E.R., J.H., H.H., T.W., & other the persons aforesaid would lie in wait & ambush not far from the said park & be ready to rescue the said N.M. & to take & deliver him & the said dogs from any person that should lay hands on them or make show to stay them;

According to which complot, confederacy, practice & device, the said N.M. in or about the 1st or 2nd day of the said month of September last past, early in the morning, having with him two brace of greyhounds, did unlawfully enter into your subject's said park of Bidston, & being come thither did in forcible & outrageous manner pull down the pales of the said park in divers parts & places thereof, & that done did let go the said dogs in or into the said park (amongst the said deer) & did then & there spoil & kill a great number of the said deer;

The said William Fells being then lately come home from London, having knowledge & understanding thereof by his wife, presently arose & went into the said park & took up the said greyhounds having made a great spoil & slaughter of divers & sundry of your subject's said deer, & afterwards espying the

said N.M. & perceiving that it was he who had committed the said misdemeanours & abuses against your said subject & her park, did forthwith go unto the said N.M. to stay him, & seeing one Richard Taylor, then & yet constable of the said Town of Bidston, not far distant, called unto the said R.T. & prayed his aid & assistance for the staying of the said N.M. his outrage, to the end that he might be punished for his said misdemeanours & abuses according as your Highness' laws in such cases do allow; Whereupon the said R.T. & your subject's said servant & officer did stay the said N.M. in his said outrage;

Nevertheless, so it is, (if it may please your excellent Majesty,) that the said E.R., J.H., H.H. & T.W., & other the persons aforesaid lying in wait & ambush not far from the said park as aforesaid, seeing & perceiving that the said N.M. was stayed of his & their pretence, & fearing & mistrusting that if he should be carried before any your Majesty's Justices of Peace to be examined, he would reveal & discover all the said secret practices, complots & devices; They the said E.R., J.H., H.H., T.W., & other the persons aforesaid, being all of them armed weaponed & arrayed with divers unlawful weapons, as long staves, swords, rapiers & daggers & divers other unlawful weapons as well defensive as invasive, did in very riotous, forcible, disordered & unlawful manner pursue & follow the said William Fells, your subject's said servant & officer & the said R.T., then constable of Bidston, unto the said town of Bidston, & being come thither did in like riotous, forcible & outrageous manner assault & set upon the said W.F. & the said R.T., giving unto them divers & sundry perilous & dangerous blows & strokes, putting them in great peril & danger of their lives, & did then & there in very violent, forcible & outrageous manner rescue & take away the said N.M. out of & from the custody & keeping of the said constable, using divers very violent, menacing & threatening words unto the said W.F. & the said constable, that if they should seem to resist them, that they would kill & slay them, & by such their violent, forcible & outrageous means did terrify the said W.F. & the said constable in such sort as that they durst not resist or withstand them, & so were enforced to suffer the said N.M. to be taken away without being examined by any your Majesty's Justices of Peace or otherwise punished according to your highness' laws in that behalf,

And the said E.R., N.M., & other the defendants beforenamed not being herewith satisfied & contented, but still persisting & continuing the said malicious minds towards your said subject

& her said servant, the said N.M. hath at divers & sundry times "insidiated" & lain in wait in or near unto the highway by which he had knowledge or understanding that the said W.F. was to pass, being armed, weaponed & arrayed with sword & dagger & other unlawful weapons, purposing to have killed, murdered or grievously wounded the said W.F. unawares as he should have passed that way; And the said E.R. of his like bad & malicious mind hath written unto the said W.F. a very menacing & threatening letter challenging him thereby to the field to fight with him; Thinking by such their lewd, wicked & unlawful means to "fear" & terrify the said W.F., your subject's said servant & keeper of the said park of Bidston, in such sort as that he should not dare to resist or withstand them in killing the said deer, but that they might kill & spoil them at their own wills & pleasures;

In tender consideration of all which premisses, & forasmuch as the said riots, routs, assaults, affrays, forces, rescues, "insidiations" & lyings in wait & other the misdemeanours & offences aforesaid are contrary to divers & sundry your Majesty's most wholesome laws & statutes of this your highness' realm, & tend to the perilous & dangerous example & encouragement of such like wicked & evil disposed persons to do & commit the like bad & lewd misdemeanours & offences if some condign & exemplary punishment be not speedily had & inflicted upon the said rioters & offenders, & are to the great prejudice, loss & hindrance of your said subject; May it therefore please your excellent Majesty to grant unto your said subject your highness' most gracious writ of subpoena to be directed unto the said E.R., J.H., H.H., N.M., & T.W., & to every of them commanding them thereby, at a day certain & under a certain pain therein to be limited, personally to be & appear before the lords of your highness' most honourable Privy Council in your Majesty's Court of Star Chamber at Westminster, then & there to answer the premises & to receive & abide such condign punishment for the said misdemeanours & offences as to your highness' most honourable Privy Council shall be in justice thought meet. And your subject as nevertheless she is in duty bounden will daily pray for your highness long, happy & prosperous reign over us.

IRELAND.<sup>1</sup>

The Answer of Edward Ravenscroft is dated Feb. 5th, 38 Eliz. (1595/6).

<sup>1</sup> The lawyer who drafted the bill was, of course, Thomas Ireland, later Sir Thomas Ireland of Bewsey.

## III.

With regard to the lengthy dispute as to the ownership of the lease of Bidston, which began shortly after the death of the Countess Margaret in September, 1596, a Star Chamber case (St. Ch. 8: E/137/13), indexed as "John Egerton, knight, v. Richard Kellie, merchant, & Richard Lusher, late servant of William Earl of Derby, concerning a messuage & lands called Bidstone, late of Christopher Themilthorpe," throws a ray of light on the circumstances in which Themilthorpe's lease was obtained. Unfortunately only a portion of the interrogatories and depositions are preserved in this bundle; the bill, which would have recited the whole story from Egerton's point of view, is missing.

After the examinations of Richard Kellie of Kingsweare in co. Devon, merchant, and Christopher Manwaring of Exeter, aged 50, esquire, Leonard Dare of Halwell in the parish of Southpool in co. Devon, gentleman, deposes that he has heard that there was a lease made by Margaret, Countess of Derby, and William, Earl of Derby, to Richard Lusher, servant to the said Earl, of a manor house and demesnes called Bidston. He knoweth that Richard Kelley discussed with Christopher Themilthorpe the procuring of a lease from the said Countess and Earl, for the discussion took place in deponent's house in Colman Street, in London, in 1596. It was agreed that if C.T. could raise half the money required to obtain the lease, then he should have half the benefit, but that if he could not raise the money, then R.K. would provide it and have the whole benefit of the lease, but would give C.T. £40 for his pains. R.K. was then obliged to go into France, in the course of his trade, and deponent, acting for him in his absence, and with the assistance of C.T., procured the lease. C.T. told deponent that £310 had to be paid for the lease, so deponent paid £200 to Mr. Hickman, now

keeper of Newgate [Richard Hickman was the Countess's receiver-general] to the use of Margaret, Countess of Derby, and paid at different times a further sum of £110 to C.T.

This deposition, though it throws no light on the origin of the dispute with Egerton, does at least show that in this matter of the lease, Kelley was the real principal and Themilthorpe was merely the lawyer who acted as his agent. Kelley was evidently a determined man and refused to be intimidated by Egerton, as will be seen from the following letter from him to Cecil, printed at p. 486 of the Hatfield MSS., Vol. 12, and referred to in a footnote to p. 180 of Mr. Brownbill's account.

1602, Nov. 25. — Kelley (to Sir Robert Cecil)

The case of Bydstow Park has now been pending six years, owing to the evasions of the defendant, Sir John Egerton, who now offers to put in a former lease & so perverts the judge's orders.

The plaintiff Kelley's lease is held to be good by the most part of the judges; it has been examined by the Judges of the Common Pleas & by Serjeant Drew & Justice Glandville, formerly his counsel.

During the last three years the defendant has offered to compromise; and lastly the Lord Keeper [*the defendant's father!*], at the hearing of the case, asked the plaintiff to compound, who answered that he was restrained from doing so.

Now considering these shifts of the defendant, & that the plaintiff has faithfully kept his promise to the Countess of Derby not to consent to any composition, I would now offer three reasons why your honour should grant a lease from your former estate if Sir John shall refuse this trial. [Sets out the reasons.]

This concludes the wrongs offered the Earl; for six years he has paid no rent; he hath taken & carried away all the red deer (except one that he could not take) to his own park; he has cut down 100 timber trees & "polls" & built with them on his own land; he has taken down a house on the Earl's land & set it up on his own; all which appears by a certificate delivered unto the Lord Chief justice by William Fells, late Keeper of the Park.

This letter is said to be holograph and of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  pages. As printed in abbreviated form, however, it would appear to be an abstract in the third person with, in the fourth paragraph, a confusing lapse into the first person, while in the final paragraph the plaintiff has disappeared from the scene and it is the Earl (of Derby) who is the victim of Egerton's misdeeds. Certainly whoever was the sufferer would seem to have had good reason to complain.