

A ROYAL VISIT

Throughout her long reign, Queen Elizabeth I made many visits to other parts of her kingdom, called a royal progress. For many years, until the late 1580s, she would travel round every spring and summer, stopping at selected grand houses and towns in southern England. She wanted both to see and be seen, by as great a number of her subjects as possible.

The queen took her court with her on these journeys, and the business of state – in which she was actively involved – continued wherever she happened to be. During a stay, there was a constant toing and froing of important people giving her information and seeking guidance, as well as writing to her, while local people would come to seek favours.

Although a visit was an honour for the host, it could be ruinously expensive. The host was expected to provide lavish accommodation for the queen – often requiring building work and refurbishment – and lay on suitable entertainment, and to put up her court servants, officials and administrators, perhaps in temporary structures. The royal household did contribute towards the costs of provisions and accommodation, but having the queen come to stay could still be a burden.

In her later years, Elizabeth did not travel so far, and tended to make sorties from her royal palaces, including Windsor. I have found no evidence of a stay in Dorney, but she did visit nearby Hitcham in August 1602, the year before she died. She stayed in a fine mansion, of which no trace remains, as the guest of Sir William Clarke. A letter records the queen's meeting with Sir William Browne, deputy governor of Flushing, in the garden at Hitcham, doubtless to update her on current events.

Little is known about Sir William, who inherited the manor of Hitcham from his mother in 1598, but he must have done some service to the queen, as he had been knighted, and in 1599 he had been picked as sheriff of Buckinghamshire. As a fairly obscure gentleman, he was perhaps delighted to receive his monarch, but he did not make a very good impression on his visitors, one of whom commented that he *“so behaved himself, that he pleased nobody, but gave occasion to have his misery and vanity spread far and wide”*. Misery in this context means miserliness, so maybe he didn't splash the cash as expected!

Sir William's daughter Dorothy married Thomas Garrard, son of Sir William Garrard of Dorney Court and one of the 15 children depicted on the fine Garrard monument in Dorney Church. It was Thomas's sister Martha who married Sir James Palmer and began the Palmer family at Dorney. Thomas married against his father's wishes, and seems to have fallen out with his parents, his father-in-law and his wife. When his marriage to Dorothy broke down, Sir William Clarke refused him entry to the house in Hitcham, calling him a rogue and a rascal. Dorothy went even further, sending him a

message that *“if he lay in the streets and starved, he should not have a groat for his relieve of her.”*

Sir William Clarke had more problems when his eldest son, in his mid-forties, married in 1619 the young widow of Sir Francis Verney; for no good reason that outsiders could see, he objected strongly to this, and refused to allow them into his home. The old man finally died in 1624, and his effigy lies in Hitcham church.

Virginia Silvester