

DERBYSHIRE ARCHÆOLOGICAL
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“The Loyal Duke of Newcastle.”

BY SIR GEORGE SITWELL, BART.

WHEN the “loyal Duke of Newcastle,” general, author, dramatist, architect, and professor of the noble arts of horsemanship and of the use of the sword, returned, with his talented but eccentric Duchess, to England, after sixteen years of exile, he hardly knew at first whether there was anything left out of his estate of £22,000 a-year in lands which he could call his own. Welbeck was in disrepair and Bolsover in ruins; by fines and forfeitures he had lost a million sterling, and of his eight parks only one had survived. As became a philosopher, and one who had lost more than he had gained by royal favour, he forswore the Court, and settled himself in the country with the intention of devoting the rest of his life to the repair of his wasted inheritance. But there was one injury which not even a philosopher could forgive, and the Duchess admits that he mourned over the ruin of those magnificent woods at Clipston, of which she gives so delightful a description:—

“The rest of the Parks [except Welbeck] were totally defaced and destroyed, both Wood, Pales, and Deer; amongst which

was also *Clipston-Park*, of seven miles compass, wherein my Lord had taken much delight formerly, it being rich of wood, and containing the greatest and tallest Timber-trees of all the Woods he had; in so much, that onely the Pale-row was valued at £2,000. It was water'd by a pleasant River that runs through it, full of Fish and Otters; was well stock'd with Deer, full of Hares, and had great store of Partridges, Poots, Pheasants, &c., besides all sorts of Water-fowl; so that this Park afforded all manner of sports, for Hunting, Hawking, Coursing, Fishing, &c."

I have some twenty or thirty letters which passed between the Duke and George Sitwell, of Renishaw, with reference to a former purchase of timber in *Clipston*; and, as the paper upon which they are written is fast turning to dust, so that in places they are illegible, and in a few years more there may be little left to read, I am anxious to put in print a few characteristic extracts. The correspondence is worth preserving, not only for the incidental information which it gives about so interesting a personage as the Duke, but as illustrating the relations existing at this time between English nobles and country gentlemen. At the present day distinctions in rank are considered to be distinctions only, and not differences, but in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries our nobles considered themselves to be superior beings; and, indeed, in many cases the superiority was a real one, and not merely a fanciful assumption.

After the forfeiture of the Newcastle estates, the Trustees for the Commonwealth sold the woods at *Clipston* to a Mr. Clarke, who commenced at once to cut them down by the thousand.* Lord Mansfield, the Duke's eldest son, who was at that time in great want of money, persuaded Mr. Sitwell, in 1656, to buy what was left of the woods, and accepted £1,000 for his confirmation of the sale. Some of these trees the purchaser

* In 1655 the borderers of Sherwood Forest complained that the Forest, and especially Clifton Woods, were ruined by Mr. Clark, who had cut down 1,000 trees in the heart of the forest, and was daily felling more.—*Cal. Dom. State Papers*, 1655, p. 137.

converted into charcoal for the use of his ironworks, but the larger number were still standing at the Restoration. Upon the return of the Duke of Newcastle, Mr. Sitwell proposed to pay for the trees he had felled, and to release the rest, upon condition that the money paid to Lord Mansfield should be returned to him with interest. The Duke, however, would hear of nothing but the unconditional surrender of the deeds of sale and confirmation. After a long correspondence, a lawsuit, and several stormy interviews (of one of which there is an amusing description), peace was made and the termination of the quarrel was marked by the Duke's acceptance of a present of four pheasants. These birds, rarer then than they are now, were no doubt bagged in Foxton or Eckington woods: into the circumstances attending their death it would be painful to inquire; indeed, so barbarous were the customs of that age, that one can only hope that they were running, and not absolutely asleep, when they fell victims to Mr. Sitwell's fowling-piece.

"for Mr. John Hutton.

"Renishawe, *Aug.* 4, 1660.

"*Sir*, when I waited upon my Lord Marquess of Newcastle I perceaved he was highly offended at me about buying some of his wood, wherein I had the worst happ possibly can be imagined to be soe misunderstood. Whatever my Lord thinks of me, yet I am well known in my country, and I thanke God know mine owne thoughts to be free from buying or desireing any thing of any man's, but what I had (as I verily conceived) by the consent of the owner,—Nay, and to doe him reall service in it too. He [Mr. Howard, a servant and accomptant to my Lord Mansfield] intreated and persuaded me to buy that I had for my Lord Mansfield's advantage and benefitt, and tould me it was his Lord^{PPS} desire; otherways I would not have given five shillings for all the wood they had. This wood I bought was formerly sould by the Trustees of the then Commonwealth to several men; as that in the cobby to one Mr. Newton of Kirkby, and that at Clipstowe to one Mr. Clarke, who was cutting it downe and

selling to all that came, as well the Cordwood as the Timber, and had sould good quantities of both before I medled, soe that all had beene gone before this tyme if I had not been brought in to buy it, and my Lord had had nothing for it, as well as the wood in Kirkby Parke, Clipstow Parke, and other of my Lord's woods where of he had noe benefitt at all. For that at Clipstow my Lord Mansfield had of us 1000^{li} *, and I have heard Sir John Digby say his father sould that manor and the wood for under 800^{li}."

[The writer, upon his return from London, had prepared an accompt, choosing rather to pay for the wood "than to rely on the Act for Confirmation of Sales, or to have any dispute with my Lord about it."]

"[Signed]

"your freind and servant,

"G. S.

"Its a sad thing if there be noe difference made between a freind and an enemy."

"for my honored freinde,

"George Sitwell, Esq^{re}.,

"at Renishaw.

"Welbeck, the 14th of *November*, 1660.

"Sir, I received your letter, and presented the contents of it to my Lord Marquis who is satisfied with it, and seems to have a good opinion of you as of any body, and, at your returne from London, his Lordship desires to see you, and then hee will

* "13 *September*, 1656.—Indenture between the right honble. Charles Cavendish, Viscount Mansfield, and George Sitwell of Renishaw, Esquire, Paule Fletcher of Walton, gent., John Magson & Robert Singleton, both of Worksopp, & Godfrey Wolstenholme, of Chesterfield, carpenter. Whereas, William Skinner and William Robinson (surviveing Trustees for the sale of lands forfeited to the Commonwealth for Treason) did, by indenture of 16th March, 1654, sell to John Clarke of London, draper, all those timber trees in the manor of Clipston for 99 years; And whereas John Clarke did by indenture of 10 November, 1655, sell the same to George Sitwell and the aforesaid persons: This indenture witnesses that the said Charles Viscount Mansfield having received 1000 *li*. doth confirm to the said parties all such timber trees."

conclude with you about your workes, & this answer hee bad mee send to you, which is very willingly obeyd by,

"Sir,

"yo^r most humble serv^t,

"F. Hutton."

"For my hon^{ed} freinde,

"George Sitwell, Esq^{re},

"at Renishaw.

"Welbeck, the 4th of Feb., 1660-1.

"Sir, I have presented the Contents of yo^r letter to my Lord Marquis, who is pleased to give this answer: that at the present hee is so full of businesse about the Voluntiers & Militia settleinge before my Lord Mansfield goeth up to London, that, till that bee settled, hee can not thinke of any private businesse, & therefore desires yo^r Patience till my Lord Mansfield be gone, w^{ch} will be as designed to-morrow senneth. This, Sir, is his answer and all I can serve you is to lett you know it. I wishe it were more in my power to manifest myself

"yo^r most faithfull

"humble serv^t,

"J. Hutton."

[Seal of the Hutton arms.]

[Undated letter to Mr. Hutton.]

"*Sir*, it's now a great while since I writt to you to London concerning the woods bought of my late Lord Mansfield. It was a true & shortt narrative of the businesse, but, least that be left & what I then writt be forgott, I have herewth sent a cobby of it to shorten this. I was in hope his honor would have taken it in to consideracion before this time, & have determined some thing of it. I acknowledge I neither have nor can deserve any freindshipp, notwthstanding, yt it was in my pore power anyways to be serviceable to his honor or my Lord Mansfield, none should be more ready & willing. In granting this my suit. to make

what I have written knowne to his honor you will oblige me to be

"your reall freind & servant.

"Since I writt this I received a letter which tells me my son George is dangerously sick at London, whither I am going to see him. I hope my Lord will resolve something by that time I returne. *Vale.*"

[Undated letter to Mr. Hutton.]

"I make bould once againe to trouble you, & intreat you would move his Ex^{cie} on our behalf that he would not be too highly offended at us, for endeavoring to obtaine our owne by a faie & legall tryall, when all other meanes is declind. The request is so reasonable that we hope he will be pleased wth it, or at least not angry when noe more is desired but what is ours by Law. Truly it would be a sad thing to live in a Country that is not governd by law: a man had better be nothing then be a slave. You will please to pardon me for giving you this trouble, & thereby you will oblige

"your assured freind to serve you,

"George Sitwell."

[A much decayed letter from Mr. Hutton, dated 29th March, 1661, seems to be the answer to the above. "His Lordship sayth he is not offended at you, nor doth take any thinge ill from you, though . . . his Lordship desires of you be of noe force or vallew.]

On Monday, the 4th June, 1661, Mr. Sitwell went towards London, in order to "try our right in the woods att Clipston." I do not know the result.

"ffor Mr. Rolston.

"*Feb.* 13th, 1662-3. *Sir*, the 5th instant I waited on his Ex^{cie} about the delivery of the deed concerning the wood att Clipston: he was soe angry that he would not heare me speake, but chid me very much, and tould me I jugled and dabled & trebled this way & that way, and would not performe my promise

made to Mr. Hutton for the delivery of the deed.* I acknowledge I said I would deliver it, but there were condicions annexed. If one take a parte of a sentence, or a parte of a promise, it may be invested contrary to the meaning of the whole. The note left wth you will manifest what I promised. I dare appeale to his Lord^{pp} out of passion from his Lo^{pp} in passion to judge who was in fault. I would rather be nothinge than be a slave, &c., &c.

“ Yo^r servant,
“ G. S.”

“ The 19th day of february 1662 I George Sitwell of Renishaw in the County of Derby doe make claime to one halfe of all the Timber trees and other Trees standing, growing, lyeing, or being in all or any of the Outwoods belonging to the Mannor of Clipston wth in the County of Nottingham called ffishcarr, Annette Bower, and the Shroggs, by vertue of a grant from the late right hon^{ble} Charles Cavendish, Viscount Mansfield ; as may appear by a Deed (refference there unto being had) beareing date the Thirtieth day of September 1656, made betweene the said Viscount Mansfield of the one partie and me the said George Sitwell & others of the other partie.”

“ ffor the right hon^{ble} the Lord Viscount Mansfield,
[Lord Mansfield’s house was in Salisbury Court, Fleet Street].

“ July 19th, 1664.

“ *My good Lord*, though I know your Lo^{pps} unwillingness to meddle with your ffathers business, yet I make bould to give yo^r honor the trouble of this in vindication of my self against the false reports of some, who, I suspect, would render me odious to yo^r honor as they have already done to his Ex^{cie} your ffather.

I beleeve those flatt^{rs} about his Ex^{cie} abuse him as well as others, and have found out the way to per-wade him, sometimes to his owne loss ; for I have heard one of them say that sometimes he

* The deed is in my possession.

would not value a Thousand pounds, when other while he would stand for a shilling. I know they hate me, and gather up any stories (as I could instance in one lately) to keepe him in anger against me."

" ffor Mr. Topp.*

" Jan. 31st, 1664-5.

" Sir, seeing his Ex^{cie} is content to pass by & forgett (&, I hope, not to beleeve) those accusations, informations & agravations that have formerly beene brought to his Lo^{pp} against me, w^{ch} have beene as well to his as my prejudice, I should be much to blame & very simple yf I did not learne at his wisdome and goodness to doe the like. I intreat you will please to present mine humble service together wth these four Phesants to his Ex^{cie}. and you will oblige

" Your friend and servant,

" G. S."

* Sir Francis Topp, created a Baronet in 1668.