Queen Elizabeth I and the Croydon horse race, with a check-list of the Queen’s visits to Croydon

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Introduction

Queen Elizabeth I made numerous visits to Croydon, where she stayed at the Archbishop of Canterbury’s palace, part of which survives as ‘The Old Palace’. There is still a room called ‘Queen Elizabeth’s Room’, and the chapel still has ‘Queen Elizabeth’s pew’. The Queen’s first three visits were made while Matthew Parker was Archbishop of Canterbury (1559–75). There were no royal visits at all while Parker’s successor Edmund Grindal was Archbishop. The visits were resumed after Grindal, who died in 1583, was in turn succeeded by John Whitgift, the third and last Archbishop of Canterbury of the reign. During the 1580s the Queen was present on several occasions at a horse race, described variously as ‘at Croydon’ or ‘near Croydon’. No evidence has come to light that she attended any other public race meeting, so that the royal visits to the Croydon race assume a special significance in the history of the Turf. A check-list of all of the Queen’s known visits to Croydon is given below, together with transcripts of the manuscripts from which extracts in modernised spelling are given in this section, or to which reference is made.

Almost all that is known about the horse race at Croydon in the time of Elizabeth I derives from two categories of royal household accounts in the Public Record Office. These are the Treasurer of the Chamber’s Accounts and the Works Accounts, both of which have payments for preparations made for the Queen at Croydon. The first mention of the horse race is in the Treasurer of the Chamber’s Account for 1585, which is the only year in which the Queen is known to have made two visits to Croydon. Her first visit was at the beginning of April, and she returned less than a month later for a visit which lasted from 28 April to 3 May 1585. The race took place during this second visit. It is possible that the race was inaugurated in 1585, or alternatively it may already have been a regular annual event which the Queen learned of during her visit at the beginning of April and which she made a special return visit to see.

The Treasurer of the Chamber’s Account shows that before the Queen’s second visit to Croydon in 1585 one of her gentlemen ushers, Francis Coot, with nine yeomen and grooms, spent eight days ‘making ready for her Majesty the Bishop’s house at Croydon’. They also spent two days ‘making ready a standing for her Majesty at the horse race at Croydon’. (The Accounts always refer to ‘the race’, never to ‘races’.) The ‘standing’ served the same purpose as a ‘stand’ at a modern race-course. The materials of which a standing was constructed, and the way in which it was conveyed to Croydon, can be learned from the Works Account for 1586. The Account has full details of payments in April 1586 for making ‘a new frame with a floor in it for the Queen’s Majesty, the noblemen, and ladies to stand in, to see the race run with horses near Croydon’. The payments show that the frame was taken by boat across the Thames from Kingsbridge (one of the landing-stages for boats at Whitehall Palace) to Lambeth, and from there in hired carts to Croydon, and back in the same way after the race. From the wording of the Account it would appear that the Queen was present at the 1586 race (since there is no hint that the standing was taken to and from Croydon without being used).

In both 1587 and 1588 Francis Coot, the gentleman usher, and his men ‘made ready’ for the Queen the Archbishop’s house at Croydon and a standing at the horse race. The dates of her visits were 27 April–2 May 1587 and 1–4 May 1588. The fact that the Queen was at Croydon on May Day in 1585, 1587, and 1588 seems to point to the race as being held on that day, at least in those years (but see the letter from Lord Howard of Effingham in April 1587 quoted below).

There is no evidence that the Queen attended the horse race after 1588. Neither the Treasurer of the Chamber’s Accounts nor the Works Accounts make any reference to Croydon in 1589.
1590 the Works Account has a small payment ‘for making ready a frame at Scotland to be sent unto Croydon to serve for the standings at the Race there holden’. ‘Scotland’ was Scotland Yard, the main store-house of building materials for the Office of Works, which was adjacent to Whitehall Palace and the Thames. The way in which the Account is worded, and the small amount paid out, taken in conjunction with a letter from the Earl of Derby (quoted below) which alludes to suspicions that a Catholic priest armed with a pistol had meant ‘evil towards’ the Queen if she had attended the race, indicate that the frame was not sent to Croydon, and that the Queen was not at the race. This alleged threat to the Queen’s life may well explain why, although the Queen made several visits to Croydon between 1592 and 1600, no further mentions of her attending the horse race have been found.

**Queen Elizabeth I’s visits to Croydon, with special reference to the horse race**

Note: the Accounts of the Cofferer and the Controller of the Household, to which frequent reference is made below, are summaries in Latin of the daily expenditure on certain items (eg food and stabling) for the Queen and her household. They give the precise location of the Court on each day, but they are extant for only some 20 years of the reign. There are payments in the Treasurer of the Chamber’s Accounts for ‘making ready’ for the Queen before her visits in 1559, 1567, 1573, 1592 and 1593, in addition to the years for which extracts from these accounts are given below (PRO E 351/541–2). Abbreviations in unpublished manuscripts have been extended. Note that ob=½d, di=½.

**1559:** 4–5 August  
Route: Eltham Palace–Croydon–Beddington (dinner, a midday meal)–Nonsuch.  
The Queen was nearing the end of a three-week ‘progress’ in Kent and Surrey, the first summer progress of her reign.  
Source for date and place: Cofferer of the Household’s Account, 1 OCT 1558–30 Sept 1559 (PRO E 101/428/15).

**1567:** 17–21 January  
Route: Whitehall Palace–Croydon–Nonsuch.  
The Spanish Ambassador reported that the Queen was going hunting at Croydon.  
Sources: *Cal Span Eliz* 1894, 1, 609–10, 613; Chambers 1923, 4, 83.

**1573:** 14–21 July  
Route: Greenwich Palace–Croydon–Orpington.  
The Queen was about to start a lengthy progress in Kent and Sussex.  

**1574**  
In May 1574 rooms were allocated at the Archbishop’s Palace in preparation for a royal visit to Croydon (Nichols 1823, 1, 385–6), but the Queen remained at Greenwich throughout May and June 1574 (Controller’s Account, PRO E 101/431/5).

**1585: first visit:** c 30 March–3 April  
Route: Lambeth–Croydon–Greenwich.  
The Queen stayed with the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace from 26 to 30 March (crossing the Thames to Westminster on 29 March for the dissolution of Parliament), and then moved on to Croydon, probably on 30 March.  
Sources: Churchwardens’ accounts of St Margaret’s, Westminster (Westminster City Libraries Archives Dept E5); Nichols 1847, 415–16.  
Treasurer of the Chamber’s Account, 29 Sept 1584–29 Sept 1585 (PRO E 351/542, m 64v): ‘To Richarde Brakenburye . . . for makinge readye for her majestie at Grenewich when she came
from Lambeth and from Croydon againste the Maundye and against Easter . . . Aprilis 1585, ix\(^{\text{ih}}\) xvi\(^{\text{is}}\) viiid.

**1585: second visit:** 28 April–3 May
Route: Greenwich–Croydon–Greenwich.
Source: Controller's Account, 1 Oct 1584–30 Sept 1585 (PRO E 101/432/1).
Treasurer of the Chamber's Account, 29 Sept 1584—29 Sept 1585 (PRO E 351/542, m 64):

To fraunces Coote one of thordenarye gentlemen ushers of her majesties Chamber for thallowaunce of him selfe one yeoman usher iii yeomen and ii gromes of the chamber ii gromes of the wardrobe and one grome porter for makinge ready for her majestie the Bishoppes house at Croydon by the space of viii dayes mense Aprilis 1585, vii\(^{\text{i}}\) xvii\(^{\text{ii}}\) iiiid.

To the same fraunces Coote for thallowaunce of him selfe and the like number of yeomen and gromes for the makinge readye a standinge for her majestie at the horse race at Croydon by the space of ii dayes mense Aprilis 1585, xxxix\(^{\text{i}}\) iiiid.

Works Account, 31 March 1585–31 March 1586 (PRO E 351/3220): ‘Croydon, the Lorde Bishopp of Caunterbury his house, xviii\(^{\text{i}}\) viii\(^{\text{i}}\) ii\(^{\text{d}}\) ob’. This was evidently the total payment for both of the Queen's visits in 1585. Detailed Works payments for other houses in other years show that such payments were primarily for carpenters and locksmiths.

**1586**
The Queen’s presence at the race is deduced from the Works Account (see below). The Cofferer’s and Controller’s Accounts for 1586 are not extant, and the Treasurer of the Chamber’s Account makes no mention of Croydon. The Queen was in residence at Greenwich Palace during the first half of 1586 (Chambers 1923, 4, 101–2).
Works Account, 31 March 1586–31 March 1587 (PRO E 351/3221):

Croydon, viz: Also allowed to the sayde accomptaunte for money by him laide out for makinge a newe frame with a flower in it for the Quenes Majestie, ye noblemen, and ladies to stande in, to see the race runne with horsses nere Croydon viz for settinge the same frame with other necessaries and attendaunce viz in Emptions of iii loades di of Timber at xiii\(^{\text{i}}\) iiiid ye loade li\(^{\text{ix}}\) and for a di loade of Timber iii\(^{\text{i}}\) x\(^{\text{d}}\) – liii\(^{\text{i}}\) x\(^{\text{d}}\). Boordes viz ii Elme boordes xviii\(^{\text{d}}\) and vii c di of Plauncheboorde at iii\(^{\text{i}}\) ye c xxx – xxxvi\(^{\text{i}}\) viid. Quarters xxxi doble – vii\(^{\text{ii}}\) viid. Rafters xii – vii\(^{\text{ii}}\) viid. Deales xxx – xxxi. Capravens xxx at vi\(^{\text{d}}\) the piece – xv\(^{\text{v}}\). Naylles of sondrie sortes – xxi\(^{\text{i}}\). In all the Emptions – vii\(^{\text{ii}}\) xvi\(^{\text{i}}\) viid. Landcardiage of the saide frame from Lambeth to Croydon and backe againe with other necessaries – xxv\(^{\text{iv}}\). Watercardiage of the saide frame from Kingsbridge to Lambeth, and backe againe at the retorned thereof – x\(^{\text{v}}\) – xxxv\(^{\text{i}}\). Boatehier – vi\(^{\text{d}}\). Rewarde to the Constable of Lambethe for takinge of cartes – ii\(^{\text{ii}}\) viid. Hyer of Laborers – ii\(^{\text{i}}\) and for Wages of Carpenters xxxvi\(^{\text{i}}\). Sawyers xvii\(^{\text{ii}}\) viid. Laborers xvi\(^{\text{ii}}\) viiii\(^{\text{d}}\). Purveyors xvi\(^{\text{i}}\). And a Clerke x\(^{\text{ii}}\) – cxv\(^{\text{i}}\) iiid. In all the chardges bestowed in and aboute the saide standinge for her Majestie at Croydon aforesaide, as by one particular paybooke containing xii daies ending the laste of April 1586 . . . maye appeare, Amountinge to the Somme of xvi\(^{\text{ii}}\) x\(^{\text{d}}\) viii\(^{\text{d}}\).

**1587:** 27 April–2 May
Route: Greenwich–Croydon–Nonsuch.
Sources: Arthur Throckmorton’s diary, 27 April 1587: ‘The Queen removed to Croydon’ (MS Hales Collection, Canterbury Cathedral Archives and Library and City and Diocesan RO); Chancery Warrant for the Great Seal: 2 May, Croydon (PRO C 82/1466); Privy Council meeting: 2 May, Nonsuch (*Privy Council, ns*, 15, 65). Sir Christopher Hatton was created Lord Chancellor by the Queen at the Archbishop’s Palace on 29 April (Campbell 1845, 2, 146).
Letter from Charles Lord Howard of Effingham to the deputy Lieutenants of Surrey, from the Court at Greenwich, 17 April 1587, extract (GMR Loseley MS 2014/50): ‘I pray you mete me at
Croydon ['at the horserace upon the 27 of this moneth' deleted; 'on May daye' inserted in margin] and we will then resolve whose shalbe Captaines'.

Treasurer of the Chamber's Account, 29 Sept 1586–29 Sept 1587 (PRO E 351/542, m 91): The Account is worded very similarly to that of April 1585. Francis Coot with eight yeomen and grooms made ready 'the Bisshoppe of Canterburyes house at Croydon for her majestie by the space of iiii days . . . Maii 1587, lxxvi viii". They also made ready 'a standinge for her majestie at the horse race at Croydon by the space of two daies . . . Maii 1587, xxxvi iiiid".

Works Account, 31 March 1587–31 March 1588 (PRO E 351/3222): 'At Croydon the Archbushopp of Canterburyes house, ixh xi d. A Standinge there to see the horse race, xiii xi vi d. '  

1588: 1–4 May
Route: Greenwich–Croydon–Greenwich.
Source: Cofferer's Account, 1 Oct 1587–30 Sept 1588 (PRO E 101/432/2).
Treasurer of the Chamber's Account, 29 Sept 1587–29 Sept 1588 (PRO E 351/542, m 105): Francis Coot with nine men made ready 'the Lord of Canteryburies house at Croydon for her majestie by the space of sixe daies . . . April 1588 . . . cviii". They also made ready 'a standing for her majestie at Croydon against the runninge of the horses there by the space of two daies . . . April 1588 . . . xxxiv iiiid".

Works Account, 31 March 1588–31 March 1589 (PRO E 351/3223): 'Croydon the lorde Archbishopp of Canterbury his Graces house, cviiis iid ob. A Standinge there for her Majestie to see the horsrace runne, viiii vii vi d.'

1589
The Cofferer's Account, 1 Oct 1588–30 Sept 1589, shows that the Queen was in residence at Whitehall Palace from 30 January to June 1589 (PRO E 101/432/4). For more than a year and a half after the coming of the Spanish Armada she seldom moved from her own palaces (Chambers 1923, 4, 103–4).

1590
The Queen was in residence at Greenwich Palace during April and May 1590 (Chambers 1923, 4, 104). The Cofferer's and Controller's Accounts for 1590 are not extant, and the Treasurer of the Chamber's Account makes no mention of Croydon.

Works Account, 31 March 1590–31 March 1591 (PRO E 351/3225):

Croydon Race, viz: Also allowed to the saide Accomptaunte for money in like maner disbursed and payde for charges done and bestowed within ye time of this Accompte for makinge readie a frame at Scotand to be sente unto Croidon to serve for ye Standinges at ye Race there holden as by one particular paielook thereof of extraordinary charge subscribed by ye saide Officers of her Majesties Woorkes hereupon also examined maye appeere xxvi iiiid.

Letter from the Earl of Derby to the Earl of Shrewsbury, 1 July 1591, extract (Lambeth Palace Library: Talbot Papers, MS 3199):

This morninge two Semynaries, Beiseley and Scott, weare execurred in fleetestreete, whoe amonges other their badd opinions traiertouslie affirmed that yf her Majestie had an armie againste the Pope here, they would feighte withe the pope against her Majestie, or that yf the pope shoulde commande them to laye vyolente handes uppon, or kill her Majestie (whom the lorde of heaven longe preserve, to raigne over us) they would willinglie doe it . . . The Courte at Greenewiche this firste of July 1591.
Post Script: My good Lord thone of theis Semynaries was at the horse race at Croyden all in greene velvet, and well mounted uppon a good geldinge, havinge alsoe a pistoll at his syde, in soe muche as it was conceyvid he mente evill towards her Majestie yf shee hadd bene there.
The two seminary priests referred to in Derby's letter were George Beesley and Montford Scott. In December 1590 Beesley was committed to the Tower of London (where the inscription which he carved in his cell in the Martin Tower can still be seen); Scott was captured and imprisoned in the same month (Anstruther 1969, 28, 304). The race at Croydon which one of the priests attended cannot therefore have been the 1591 race, and was presumably the 1590 race (since it is improbable that there was ever any likelihood of the Queen going to the 1589 race).

The gentleman usher who 'made ready' for the Queen at Croydon at each of her visits for the horse race, Francis Coot Esquire of St Ann Blackfriars parish in London, died in January 1590 at his brother Christopher's home in Norfolk. By a nuncupative (oral) will he left all his goods to his wife Anne (PRO PROB 11/75/57).

**1592:** 17–21 April
Route: Wimbledon–Croydon–Sydenham (dinner)–Greenwich.
The Queen was nearing the end of a two-week progress in Middlesex and Surrey.
Sources: *Cal Salisbury MSS* 1915, 13, 465; Chambers 1923, 4, 106.

**1593:** 2–17 May
Route: Whitehall Palace–Streatham (dinner)–Croydon–Nonsuch.
Sources: *HMC Various Coll* 1903, 107; Chambers 1923, 4, 108.

**1598:** 27 September
Probable route: Beddington–Croydon–Beddington.
The Queen stayed with Sir Francis Carew at Beddington during the second half of September 1598 (the exact dates of this visit are unknown). Source for Beddington visit: Treasurer of the Chamber's Account, 29 Sept 1597–29 Sept 1598 (PRO E 351/543, m 24v).
Source for Croydon visit: *Henslowe's Diary* 1904–8, 1, 72 (and see 2, 241–3). Philip Henslowe noted: 'lent w'm borne the 27 of septmbr 1598 when he Reade to croyden to ther lorde when the quene came thether, v'. William Borne was one of the Admiral's Men, the company of actors whose patron was the Earl of Nottingham, Lord Admiral. The Earl's Surrey residence was Haling House, Croydon. Fleay 1898, 13 'had no doubt' that a play called *Chance Medley* was acted on this occasion, but there is no actual evidence as to which play (if any) was performed. Fleay 1898, 7–9, 12, also believed that plays were performed during the Queen's visits to Croydon in 1573, 1591 [sic] and 1592, but this was also conjecture. For a discussion of the alleged performances in 1591 and 1592 see Chambers 1923, 3, 426–7, 451–3.

**1600:** 14 August
Route: Beddington–Croydon (dinner)–Beddington.
Source: Collins 1746, 2, 210.

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