

## The hard case of Sir Polycarpus Wharton

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*In the last decades of the 17th century, Polycarpus Wharton, the son of an important Ordnance Board official, was by far the most important supplier of gunpowder to the government. He produced at several sites including Chilworth mills in Surrey, the largest gunpowder manufactory in England, and was so well thought of that he was asked by the Ordnance Board to help develop and improve the quality of gunpowder production. Yet growing financial problems meant that in 1698 he ceased production, and subsequently petitioned the Board about debts which he claimed were owed to him and his father. So severe were his problems that he spent some time in a debtor's gaol, and the evidence suggests that he never recovered financially. This article attempts to recount what is known of his life and career, but cannot explain his quarrel with the Ordnance Board.*

When John Aubrey's history of Surrey was published in 1719, the unusual step was taken of reprinting in full a document entitled *The hard case of Sir Polycarpus Wharton, baronet*, which had first been issued in 1710.<sup>1</sup> This document detailed some of the problems with the Ordnance Board that had brought Polycarpus from a position as England's leading producer of gunpowder to that of near insolvency by 1710. Polycarpus had produced gunpowder at several sites, but by far the most important was Chilworth mills in Surrey, which during the twenty years between 1677 and 1698 that Polycarpus worked there was by far the largest gunpowder manufactory in England. A survey of the English gunpowder industry in 1687 illustrates just how important a producer Polycarpus was and just how important a site was Chilworth.<sup>2</sup>

Polycarpus had probably entered the gunpowder industry because his father, Sir George Wharton, had become a leading figure in the Ordnance Board after the Restoration. In a review of the Ordnance at this date, Tomlinson describes George as an example of an authentic administrative careerist. George had been born in Westmorland, the son of a blacksmith who had died during his infancy. He had been left in the care of two uncles with an estate of £50 a year. He had studied astronomy and mathematics at Oxford, and from 1641 until 1666 had issued an almanac annually, with the exception of 1646. He had been a staunch royalist, selling his estate in the north to raise a troop to serve the king in the Civil War, and he had become paymaster to the magazine and artillery at the king's headquarters in Oxford. His position after the king's defeat was difficult, and he only avoided hanging through the intervention of another famous astrologer, Elias Ashmole, for whom he had procured a commission in the royalist ordnance service in 1646, and whom he had first introduced to the pleasures of astrology and alchemy. He was to live on Elias's estate during the Interregnum. At the Restoration George was rewarded for his loyalty by being appointed treasurer and paymaster to the Ordnance Board with an official residence in the Tower of London, and by being created a baronet in December 1677. He was also secretary to the commission for regulating the farming and making of saltpetre that was appointed in 1666, a body about which little is known, except that its purpose was to encourage and control the domestic production of saltpetre in an attempt to relieve war-time shortages and dependency on imports. Also, from 1670 until his death, George was the Ordnance Board's storekeeper for saltpetre at the Minorities and Woolwich. Sir George died at his house at Enfield in Middlesex in August 1681, leaving bequests of £6425 in cash and leases to ten London houses to his family of four sons and three daughters. Polycarpus was the eldest son, and was the sole executor of his father's estate and heir to the baronetcy.<sup>3</sup>

Of the early life of Polycarpus little is known. It has not been established when or where he was born, or what sort of education he received, but there is evidence of an early training in the gunpowder industry under the auspices of a friend of his father. In May 1673 the will of Robert Richardson, citizen and skinner, was proved. Robert had been involved in the gunpowder industry for some years, and in his will he left several powder mills on Hounslow Heath to his brother, John, and a lease to powder mills at Wooburn in Buckinghamshire to 'my now Servant Polycarpus Wharton'. Polycarpus's father, described as a friend, was an executor of Richardson's estate and was well rewarded in the will himself.<sup>4</sup> Soon afterwards, in September 1673, Polycarpus received his first contract to supply gunpowder to the Ordnance.<sup>5</sup>

Little is known of these mills on the river Wye at Wooburn, but they seem to have been first erected during the Second Dutch War (1665-67) by James Lloyd, a gunpowder manufacturer whose main production site was at Wandsworth. The mills had been set up at the request of the Ordnance Board during the war, and in July 1671 the Ordnance Board paid Lloyd £200 compensation for the losses that he had sustained in erecting the mills, only to find that they were not employed full-time as he had been led to expect. Lloyd had had financial problems that had led to his withdrawal from the industry at some date between 1668 and 1671, so it seems likely that Richardson first acquired the site during these years.<sup>6</sup>

During the first few years after he acquired Wooburn mills, Polycarpus appears in the records as a supplier of gunpowder to the Ordnance, but also as an occasional supplier of double refined saltpetre and powder barrels, and as a supplier of fireworks for celebrations at Portsmouth. These contracts were always in his own name.<sup>7</sup> Then in 1678 Polycarpus Wharton and John Freeman first appear in the Ordnance records as joint suppliers of gunpowder, having signed a contract in November 1677 to supply 350 barrels a month.<sup>8</sup> A war with France had broken out, and to increase supplies the Ordnance had encouraged Wharton and Freeman to take out a 21 year lease on Chilworth mills in Surrey.<sup>9</sup> Freeman was the son of John Freeman, a London merchant who had supplied gunpowder to the Ordnance as early as 1644, but who probably had not taken up production himself until the early 1650s, when he took over at Sewardstone mills on the river Lea in Essex. He was still producing there on his death in 1678-79. Sewardstone was over the river from Enfield where George Wharton lived, so this provides a local link which might explain why their two sons set up as partners.<sup>10</sup> It is also possible that John Freeman had had some previous links with Chilworth, for in November 1674 he was ordered to remove all powder from the Tower that he had delivered on Vincent Randyll's account. Randyll had been the producer at Chilworth for some years, and had only recently died.<sup>11</sup>

Gunpowder production had long been an important industry at Chilworth. Production commenced in 1626 when the East India Company set up mills to produce gunpowder from the saltpetre they were importing from the Far East. The Company found that saltpetre was particularly useful as a ballast cargo. After ten years this venture folded, and the Company surrendered its lease to the mills. However production was to continue, for the mills were taken over by Samuel Cordwell, who, along with George Collins, the son of Edward Collins, the East India Company's powder maker at Chilworth, had been awarded a monopoly to supply the Ordnance in 1636. Collins was soon to disappear from the scene, but Cordwell held the monopoly until it was cancelled by parliament in 1641. Despite some interruptions to production and the destruction of his capacity during the Civil War, Cordwell continued to produce gunpowder at Chilworth until his death in 1648, and he was then succeeded by his brother, Robert Cordwell, who died in 1651. After that, production was taken over, first by Josias Dewye and others and then by the owner of Chilworth mills, Vincent Randyll.<sup>12</sup>

Although Randyll had wanted to supply powder during the First Dutch War (1652-54), it is not until 1656 that there is any indication that he was an Ordnance supplier. But from then on he was an important and regular supplier until his death in 1673. His will made no reference to his gunpowder business, except to note a large sum of money that was due to him from the king with the comment that 'I know not how and in what manner the same may

be paid But hope the same wilbe well paid'. His eldest son, Morgan Randyll, inherited the mills but did not continue the business, choosing to pursue a parliamentary career instead. In 1671 a long term contract had been awarded to Vincent Randyll by the Ordnance, but this had been cancelled in February 1672 on the outbreak of the Third Dutch War (1672-74). As part of the compensation for this cancellation, the Ordnance agreed to rent Chilworth mills for eleven years. Thus the Ordnance paid Morgan £515 for two years rent of the mills from 18 December 1673, 'when ye said Mills ceased to Worke', until 19 December 1675, and a further £396 5s for one and a half years' rent until Michaelmas 1677.<sup>13</sup>

It thus seems likely that Chilworth mills had lain idle after Vincent Randyll's death. In 1677 the Ordnance surveyor, Sir Jonas Moore, surveyed the site. He noted that there were seventeen overshot watermills which could be worked in dry years as well as during the greatest frosts, that the mills were in a very good condition and could produce 1000 barrels of gunpowder a month; he also emphasised that their location was such that deliveries could be made to both London and Portsmouth. Sir Polycarpus was later to claim that as a result of this report he and Freeman were encouraged to take out a 21 year lease on Chilworth mills at £200 a year, with an understanding that the Ordnance pay part of the rent and make some allowance for the dead stock and for any repairs, especially when the mills were not employed in supplying the Ordnance. Sir Polycarpus was also later to claim that the mills had not been in a good condition when they took them over, and that they had had to repair them at their own expense for about £1500.<sup>14</sup>

Over the next few years Wharton and Freeman as partners regularly supplied gunpowder to the Ordnance from Chilworth, to meet their original contractual obligations and the subsequent reduced peacetime contracts. Both also supplied separately as individuals, Wharton from Wooburn, and Freeman from Sewardstone, and both obtained large separate contracts for repairing powder in September 1681.<sup>15</sup>

There is also evidence of an early disagreement over the terms of the 1677 agreement to lease Chilworth mills. In June 1680 Bernard de Gomme, the Ordnance surveyor-general, and Samuel Fortrey, the clerk of deliveries, travelled to Chilworth, Weybridge and London to take note of the quantities of gunpowder and saltpetre still in the hands of Wharton and Freeman. The following week a case was presented by Freeman and a legal opinion was sought on whether and how far the king was obliged financially to meet the costs of the dead stock and the rent at Chilworth. Freeman was £4742 in debt to the Ordnance, and so an agreement was made that he would deliver 742 barrels out of his stock of 1210 barrels at Wooburn, Weybridge, Chilworth and London. There does seem to have been an interruption in the partners' contractual deliveries to the Ordnance around this time, but by the end of the year such deliveries recommenced, so the argument may have been settled. However, there were similar queries about the dead stock and the rental payments in November 1682, and a further visit to Chilworth and Weybridge was made by Sir Bernard de Gomme in May 1683 to see what powder and saltpetre was still held by Wharton and Freeman.<sup>16</sup>

During these disputes, as part of their claim for financial assistance from the Ordnance, Wharton and Freeman provided a document outlining their production costs (table 1). This document provides a rare insight into the production costs of the industry at this date. But one item in particular is missing from the account, the cost of the major raw material, saltpetre. This is because the Ordnance normally supplied saltpetre to the producers contracted to them, the contract specifying a certain number of barrels in return.

Wharton and Freeman might have had problems with the Ordnance, but they were still the experts approached by the Ordnance in January 1681 when they wanted someone to go to Germany, then reputed to produce the best quality gunpowder, in order to learn about the better production techniques in use there. The partners recommended a Robert Barton. Sir Polycarpus was later to claim that he had been asked to attend Prince Rupert to discuss whether he could make gunpowder as strong as that made in Germany, that within one year he had undertaken the task to such perfection that his powder was both stronger and cheaper than that available from Germany, and that he had erected mills near Windsor

[items costed]	£	s	d
170 loads of charcoal at £5 5s per load	892	10	-
80 tons of brimstone at £11 10s per ton	920	-	-
100 chaldrons of seacoal at 30s per chaldron	150	-	-
500 loads of wood at 11s per load	275	-	-
120 loads of peat at 10s 9d per load	64	10	-
100 thousand barrel boards at £6 per mill	600	-	-
40 loads of hoops at 36s per load	72	-	-
100 loads of timber at 40s per load	200	-	-
spare brass heads and bottoms at 9d per lb	157	19	-
2 stove pans with rails and sieves fixed	150	-	-
4 coppers valued at	160	-	-
97 copper pans at 15d per lb	224	-	-
11 double mills at £50 each	550	-	-
8 single mills at £33 6s 8d each	266	13	4
	4682	12	4
minus capital value of the mills	816	13	4
	£3865	19	-

Table 1 Annual production costs at Chilworth mills, from an account provided by John Freeman junior and Polycarpus Wharton for working Chilworth powder mills for one year.<sup>17</sup>

[probably at Wooburn] 'much differing from the common Sort' that were capable of making 40 barrels of this type of powder weekly. Yet, he complained, he had not received any compensation for his investment of £2700 in this project, nor any subsequent Ordnance contracts for this type of powder.<sup>18</sup>

In September 1684 John Freeman died, his will describing him as a gentleman of Sewardstone. This will showed that he was producing gunpowder on his own account at Sewardstone mills and at Naked Hall mills at Enfield in Middlesex,<sup>19</sup> as well as in partnership with Sir Polycarpus Wharton at Chilworth mills. He left Polycarpus, the son of Sir Polycarpus Wharton, the two mills on the Lea and all his stock there, whilst to Sir Polycarpus he left his share of their stock at Chilworth. Since the son was still a minor, his father took over the mills in trust until he should reach his majority. The will also mentioned several small monetary bequests to Ordnance clerks, a third share in an unspecified glasshouse, and his residence at Sewardstone. He left a life interest in this last to his wife, Anne, but that was all she was left. She did contest the will, arguing that her husband had not been sensible at the time he made it, but it was allowed to stand.<sup>20</sup>

Within a month of Freeman's death Sir Polycarpus was instructed to complete the outstanding contracts that Freeman had in his own name for the production of gunpowder at Sewardstone, as well as complete in his own name the joint contract they held for the production of gunpowder at Chilworth. The same minute makes it clear that Sir Polycarpus was to complete contracts in his own name for the production of gunpowder at Wooburn as well.<sup>21</sup> Thereafter Sir Polycarpus always supplied the Ordnance in his own name; there is no evidence that he ever worked in partnership again. In 1684 Sir Polycarpus was thus in control of three separate production sites, at Chilworth, Sewardstone and Wooburn. He was the dominant manufacturer in the industry, a position clearly demonstrated in a survey of gunpowder mills made for the Ordnance in 1687 by Sir Henry Sheere, the Ordnance surveyor general, and Thomas Gardiner, the Ordnance storekeeper (table 2).

This survey emphasises that Chilworth was by far the largest gunpowder manufactory in England, and that Sir Polycarpus had over 50% of the industry's capacity under his control.

Producer	Mills	100lb barrels per week
Mr Tiphaine & Azire	Faversham	48
Monsieur de Plaite & Dante	Crawford (Crayford)	6
Monsieur de Paine	Temple mills (Leyton)	9
Mr Samyne	Walthamstow	24
Sir Polycarpus Wharton	Susam (Sewardstone)	36
Sir Peter Rich	Wandsworth	84
Sir Peter Rich	Molsey (East Molesey)	72
Mr Hudson	Waltham Abbey	42
Sir Polycarpus Wharton	Chilworth	270
Sir Polycarpus Wharton	Clapton	72
Capt Richardson	Hounslow	60

Table 2 National gunpowder production capacity, 1687.<sup>22</sup>

Of Chilworth it was said that they had 'deservedly obteyned ye Reputation of ye best & noblest of that kind in England', even though as Sir Polycarpus was later to claim 'by reason of the Situation of Chilworth Works, the Carriage and Re-Carriage of all Materials doubled the Charge of all other Powder-works'.<sup>23</sup> The survey is also notable in that Sir Polycarpus is no longer shown as producing at Wooburn, but producing at another site, Clapton in Middlesex. Had production ceased at Wooburn altogether, or was it that the capacity had been converted to produce a type of gunpowder that the Ordnance did not require and was thus not included in the Ordnance's survey?<sup>24</sup>

Of the site at Clapton in the parish of Hackney in Middlesex little is known, but it probably relied on horse power rather than water power, as it was too far from the Lea to tap that river. In 1652 a survey of the manors of Hackney and Stepney noted a gunpowder mill and gunpowder houses in the occupation of William Hobley on a road between Hackney and Old Ford. It may have been this site which the Worrall brothers worked until financial problems forced them out of the industry in 1669, and which Polycarpus was working in 1687.<sup>25</sup> Nothing else is known of Sir Polycarpus's links with this area, and no later indication of gunpowder production at Clapton has been discovered.

Despite this prominence, Sir Polycarpus was already suffering from those problems that were eventually to lead to his withdrawal from the industry and his eventual entry into debtors' prison, namely the disputes with Ordnance over the settlement of his father's accounts as treasurer, and over his own contracts for the supply of gunpowder. Initially he seemed to have received some satisfaction. In December 1687 he was paid £2000 compensation in response to his complaints about the the leasing of Chilworth mills, and the original contract was annulled and a new one agreed. Sir Polycarpus was later to claim that he had been forced or 'overperswaded' to accept these terms and enter into the new contract to supply 1200 barrels a year 'above his Proportion with other Powdermakers', under threat that if he did not then he would no longer be employed by the Ordnance. He was also to complain that the new contract meant that he was expected to meet all the rent and maintenance costs for the remainder of the lease.<sup>26</sup> Shortly after this new agreement had been made Sir Polycarpus invested in three new incorporation mills at Chilworth, which raised production capacity to 1200 barrels a month,<sup>27</sup> but he was soon to complain about his position.

In 1690 Sir Polycarpus petitioned the king about his lease to Chilworth mills, which was costing him about £1000 a year in rent and other charges, and towards which he had only received £2000 in thirteen years from the Ordnance 'which hath proved almost ye Ruine of himselfe and Family'. He sought further monetary compensation and a monthly payment thereafter. Of Chilworth mills he wrote 'which workes being so Considerable that (with Encouragement) they can make more Powder, than all ye other workes in ye Kingdome,

which Workes neither Floods frosts or Scarcity of Water can Obstruct, Which Inconveniencies all other Workes are Lyable to'. When this petition was read before the Privy Council on 4 December 1690 the king ordered a report. This report was given to the Council on 19 February 1691. It spoke of Sir Jonas Moore's survey in 1677 and the survey by Sheere and Gardiner in 1687; it noted that in 1677 Wharton and Freeman had been advanced £3000 and that since then a further £2000 had been given 'by agreement as a full compensation at that time of all ye Charges which he had been at & damage which he had Susteyned by not having a full employment for his Mills from this Office'. In their opinion this had settled the dispute, but in view of the increased war demands for gunpowder it was felt useful to award Sir Polycarpus the sum of £750 and a monthly sum of £200 thereafter.

A couple of years later, Sir Polycarpus was to complain that this sum was only a fifth of his monthly charge, and that in any case it was now in arrears by £3000. He asked for £3000 and a higher monthly payment, but a similar letter on the same theme does suggest that the Ordnance did not meet these later demands.<sup>28</sup> There were further financial problems in 1692, for in June that year R Bowring wrote to the Treasury about the £7000 that was due to his master, Sir Polycarpus, for powder he had already delivered. So severe had Sir Polycarpus's financial constraints become that 'he is not able to keep his men at Work (he being forced to go downe to his Works to Appease them, they refusing to work any longer'. Bowring proposed a loan of £7000 to satisfy Polycarpus's creditors and workmen immediately.<sup>29</sup> The reply to this letter is not known, and there is no later reference to such a loan or evidence of any other help at this time.

In April 1695 Sir Polycarpus was to complain that he was not receiving as large contracts as he was entitled to from the Ordnance, stating that from 1687 until April 1695 he had only been contracted to provide 32,852 barrels rather than the 51,685 barrels to which the 1687 contract entitled him.<sup>30</sup> An undated document from this period noted these problems, and the fact that at Chilworth he had a stock of utensils worth about £4000 and a stock of materials sufficient to produce 1200 barrels a month for fourteen months.<sup>31</sup> His financial problems during this decade were only worsened by the fact that the Ordnance paid him in tallies rather than in cash from about 1692 onwards, and he had been forced to discount these in the financial markets at a loss of 10-30%.<sup>32</sup>

Sir Polycarpus was still regularly supplying the Ordnance up until 1697, when the Treaty of Ryswick was signed,<sup>33</sup> but when demand from the Ordnance increased once again after the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1701 his name never again appears as a supplier. He was later to claim that when the end of his lease to Chilworth mills approached he had sent many letters to the Ordnance asking about their intentions with regard to the mills, but he had received no reply until after the lease had expired in 1698, when presumably they had declined to provide a new lease.<sup>34</sup>

Of his activities during the 1690s, it is known that he continued to work Chilworth mills until the expiration of his lease, and that he worked the Sewardstone mills and possibly the Naked Hall mills in Enfield that he had inherited from his erstwhile partner, John Freeman. However nothing is known of either of the other sites that he was associated with, at Wooburn and at Clapton. Had he still continued at these sites during the 1690s or had he already run down his business? It is also known that in 1692 he was delivering powder to the Royal African Company in partnership with another powder maker, John Richardson, but that after that Richardson supplied the Company in his own name.<sup>35</sup> This is a rare piece of evidence about Sir Polycarpus's involvement in the private markets. It is not yet known how common such activity was, and much research into Company records remains to be done. However, most of the evidence about Sir Polycarpus does suggest that he was mainly concerned with the Ordnance, and that the Chilworth mills were exclusively so used.

In 1701 Sir Polycarpus petitioned complaining that the Ordnance had charged him with an arrears of £9573 6s 6d. He claimed that he had suffered great losses of about £24,000 on his lease to Chilworth mills, and that he was owed about £4000 on the settlement of his father's account. In November the Ordnance response noted that Sir Polycarpus owed them

£7943 6s 6d, accepted that about £4000 was due to him on his father's accounts, and stated that it was impossible to evaluate his charge and loss on the lease to Chilworth mills. However it did emphasise the £2000 settlement he had received in 1687. The report concluded that the balance owed him could be used to meet his debts to the office, but also noted that 'since our time he has had much better treatment than other Artificers'.<sup>36</sup> This was the first exchange in a series of petitions and responses that were to follow Sir Polycarpus's retirement from the industry, and which were still being exchanged, presumably without any settlement, as late as 1723.

In 1703 Sir Polycarpus drew up the following account (table 3) of his outstanding dealings with the Ordnance when he petitioned the Privy Council asking for compensation for working Chilworth mills and for the balance of his father's account. He spoke of being on the 'brink of ruin', and of his large family.

Owed by Sir Polycarpus Wharton to the Crown		£	s	d
10 Aug 1682	to gunpowder in arrears upon a contract to himself and Freeman 363 barrels at 36s each	653	8	-
19 Feb 1683	to more in arrears upon another contract for 400 barrels to more on another contract with executor of Freeman	20 310	- 7	- 6
10 Mar 1695	repair contract 1147 barrels & 90lb at 40s	2295	16	-
23 Apr 1696	moneys imprested by Treasury and Ordnance	4593	15	-
Owed to Sir Polycarpus Wharton		£	s	d
24 Jan 1679	salary due Sir George Wharton	123	11	6
	debenture from Ordnance to Polycarpus	2797	9	9<?>
	debenture from Ordnance to Freeman in Randyll's name	166	1	10
12 Aug 1681	moneys due Sir George Wharton	3654	2	-
	money due to Polycarpus for experiment in making strong powder	2700	-	-
19 Feb 1683	overcharge, 935 barrels 43lb of powder	374	-	-
	charge and expense in first repairing Chilworth mills in 1677	1500	-	-
	accidents in blowing up of mills and sinking of barges	3500	-	-
	discounting tallies	2500	-	-
	stock at end of lease	2000	-	-
	what he reckons is due for not having Chilworth mills constantly employed	15500	-	-
View of Sir Francis Pemberton and Mr Finch on second contract		£	s	d
24 Jan 1698	By not working, 10200 barrels	14516	10	-
2 Aug 1703	Interest on £3654 2s due on father's account 1681 to 1703 and the sum he was forced to pay 252 barrels of powder refused	9513	8	4

Table 3 Sir Polycarpus Wharton's statement of accounts, 1703.<sup>37</sup>

Sir Polycarpus was to claim that this petition was referred to the Ordnance Board, but that no response was received from them until June 1710, when they merely referred to their report of November 1701 and stated that they knew no more. Sir Polycarpus was to describe this response as 'A fatal Delay to him, who was for want of it thrown into Prison', from whence he sent a reply specifying 'three weighty Particulars, where the Report drawn by Mr Musgrave [of 1701] was false in Fact'. However no immediate response was forthcoming because Musgrave had the relevant records still in his keeping, so Sir Polycarpus prepared the case that was reprinted in Aubrey's History.<sup>38</sup>

Nothing further has been discovered of what happened next, except that in September 1710 the matter was referred to the commissioners of the Treasury after a further plea from

Sir Polycarpus,<sup>39</sup> but the fact that the case was reprinted in 1719 'at the Request of a Gentleman who communicated it' does suggest that no settlement had been made. Then in 1720, possibly as a result of the publicity gained by the publication of his case, Sir Polycarpus petitioned the Ordnance Board requesting their assistance in obtaining at least £3653 11s 6d<?>. Once again he met with rejection, for the Ordnance merely noted their reports of 1701 and 1710, and concluded that the matter was so old that they had no proper knowledge of it and could find nothing in their records.<sup>40</sup> Sir Polycarpus made a further appeal in 1723 when he asked for £3781 17s 3d to be paid to him as a settlement of his father's accounts and mentioned his losses over the lease to Chilworth, but received the reply that 'my lords can do nothing herein'.<sup>41</sup>

The petition of 1723 did introduce one new note. At the end of it he mentioned that 'to prevent his foreseen Ruin <he> thereby employed his Thought upon his Shell, a description of its Service being annex'd'. This description has not been found, and all else that is known of this aspect of Sir Polycarpus's career is that in the early 1690s the Ordnance officers had been asked to test 'certain pieces of brass' and a quantity of strong powder that had been invented by him.<sup>42</sup> The exchange in 1723 is the last that is known of Sir Polycarpus. No later reference, even to his death has been found, and all that is known is that the baronetcy was extinct by 1741.<sup>43</sup>

With the withdrawal of Sir Polycarpus from the industry in 1697 it is difficult to establish exactly what happened at the sites he had been concerned with. Nothing whatsoever is known of when he ceased working either the Wooburn, Naked Hall or Clapton mills, but it seems possible that he had ceased working them before 1697, and it seems probable that they were not worked subsequently by any other gunpowder producer. However it is known that Chilworth and Sewardstone mills did remain gunpowder production sites after Sir Polycarpus's retirement, even though there remains some confusion as to what happened next.

The 21 year lease to Chilworth ended in 1698, and it is obvious that Sir Polycarpus never took out a new one. When these mills were the largest in the country there had been three separate sites within the manufactory, all dedicated to gunpowder. A survey of the mills in 1728 noted that the upper works were now derelict, that the middle site had four gunpowder incorporating mills *in situ*, and that the lower works had been converted to paper mills. It is known that these lower mills had been converted to paper production in 1704, and that Francis Grueber, one of England's largest gunpowder producers, was present in the Chilworth area in 1716, and in 1719 took a lease of the gunpowder mills at an annual rent of £74.<sup>44</sup> It seems unlikely that such an important site would have been allowed to fall out of use during such a period of high demand for gunpowder as the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14). Is it possible that Grueber had produced here for some years before 1719, perhaps from the very outset of the war, or had there been another so far unknown producer in between? There is one supplier to the Ordnance from 1705 until 1714, Samuel Shephard, for whom no production site is known. Could he have been working Chilworth mills before Grueber? In addition, is it possible that the upper mills had been worked until the end of the war, and that it was only after the war ended that they were allowed to decay to the state shown in the survey of 1728? More information about Chilworth in the early decades of the 18th century is needed.<sup>45</sup>

At Sewardstone mills it is known that from 1704 until 1709 they were worked by Edward Gibbon, the father of the famous historian. Initially Gibbon leased them from Sir Polycarpus, who had inherited them after the death of his son, Polycarpus, before he had reached his majority. In April 1707 Sir Polycarpus, described as of Sewardstone, baronet, raised a £400 mortgage from Gibbon on part of this property, and the following year sold his interest in the mills to his son, Edward Wharton, for £800. In 1709 Gibbon ceased production and a new tenant, Edward Parre the younger of Doctors' Commons, London, took over Sewardstone mills. Parre did obtain one small contract from the Ordnance soon afterwards, but after he fulfilled it he never obtained another one despite the continuing war. Nevertheless, as late as

1715, inventories of the property still described it as a gunpowder mill, even though it may no longer have been worked. Soon after 1715 however these mills were converted to other uses, possibly copper working, but more evidence is needed to be certain, and by 1740 the site had a small mill, a rice mill and a snuff mill in operation.<sup>46</sup>

Sir Polycarpus was not the only member of his family to face financial ruin; his son Edward did also. As early as 1709 he had agreed to sell part of the land on which Sewardstone mills stood to Parre for £100 down and an annuity of £20 for fifteen years but, because of disputes over who owned the land and because of his own pressing financial needs, he was forced to settle for £50 in full satisfaction.<sup>47</sup> By 1715 Edward had no interest whatsoever in any part of the mills and their associated property. This is the last that has been discovered of Edward. Another son of Sir Polycarpus may also have been associated with the family business, for in August 1723 a George Wharton, esquire, late of Sewardstone, gunpowder maker, who had taken refuge in the Mint in Southwark to escape his creditors, gave notice that he was to seek a discharge pursuant to an Act for the relief of debtors lately passed.<sup>48</sup> No other reference to this George Wharton has been discovered.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 The original petition, *The hard case of Sir Polycarpus Wharton, baronet*, [1710] (BL: 816 m.5 159) was reprinted in Aubrey's *History of Surrey* after Aubrey's death in 1697. Published by Edmund Curll in 1719, the work was a heavily edited version of the author's *Perambulation* of the county, 'continued to the present time' by Richard Rawlinson (Enright 1955).
- 2 See table 2; PRO: WO 49/220
- 3 *DNB*; Tomlinson 1979, 84; PRO: PROB 11/367, sig 124; Evelyn, *Diary*, 3, 443; Roy 1964 & 1975, 2, 493-4; Hogg 1963, 198, 1102
- 4 PRO: PROB 11/342, sig 64
- 5 PRO: WO 51/16, f 77
- 6 Lloyd had first entered the industry in 1656, in partnership with Abel Richardson who had died in September 1658. Abel left his share of the partnership to his three children, Joseph, Sophia and Elizabeth. The exact relationship, if any, of Robert Richardson to Abel has not been discovered, but it does seem probable that Robert acquired the site at Wooburn through a family connection: PRO: WO 47/6, f 54; WO 47/8, 8 Feb 1666; WO 48/11, f 108; WO 51/12, f 196; WO 51/13, f 43; PROB 11/284, sig 635; Crocker, A, 1992, 15
- 7 PRO: WO 49/103, f 35; WO 51/16, ff 77, 96, 140, 152, 207, 233; WO 51/17, ff 55, 92, 184; WO 51/19, f 184; WO 53/20, ff 103, 145
- 8 PRO: WO 51/20, ff 134, 145. A barrel of gunpowder contained 100lb (45kg).
- 9 PRO: T1/13 no 13
- 10 For details of John Freeman's career see Fairclough 1985.
- 11 PRO: WO 47/19B, 24 Sept 1674. These same orders also instructed Freeman to deliver no more powder to the Ordnance and to return all saltpetre that the Ordnance had delivered to him. The reason for such an order has not been established.
- 12 Crocker & Crocker 1990, 140; *VCH Sy*, 1, 318-21; Wilks forthcoming
- 13 *VCH Sy*, 2, 306-329; Henning 1983, 3, 313; PRO: WO 47/7, f 78; WO 51/18, f 172; WO 51/19, f 196; PROB 11/344, sig 10
- 14 PRO: T1/13, no 13; *Hard case*
- 15 PRO: WO 47/9, ff 23, 26; WO 48/21, 24 May 1683; WO 55/1757, ff 2, 4, 5, 6
- 16 PRO: WO 47/9, ff 22, 23, 24, 26; WO 47/12, f 33
- 17 PRO: WO 55/1756
- 18 PRO: WO 47/9, ff 118, 121; T1/58, no 58; *Hard case*
- 19 The Naked Hall mills were probably located east of the river Lea at Enfield, in the area between the modern Enfield Lock (TQ 371 984) and the weir at TQ 375 992. Between April 1665 and August 1673 the mills were worked by John Lucas, but nothing else is known. It is not known how Freeman acquired them or how long they remained in production: PRO: WO 47/19B, 5 Aug 1673; WO 47/7, ff 58, 90
- 20 PRO: PROB 11/380, sig 103; PROB 11/381, sig 161; ERO: D/DB M202
- 21 PRO: WO 47/14, f 29
- 22 PRO: WO 49/220. The name of Grueber is also entered at the bottom of this survey, but it is crossed out and no other information is included. It seems probable that this was Francis Grueber, a Huguenot refugee, who was only just in the process of entering the industry (Fairclough forthcoming).
- 23 PRO: T1/13, no 13; T1/58, no 58

- 24 Crocker, A, 1992  
 25 LBHLS: D/F/TYS 46, survey of Stepney and Hackney 1652; PRO: WO 47/19A, f 286  
 26 PRO: WO 51/35, f 160; T1/58, no 58; *Hard case*  
 27 PRO: T1/13, no 13; T1/58, no 58  
 28 *ibid*; PRO: T1/19, no 30; *Cal SPD* 1690, 463  
 29 PRO: T1/19, no 30  
 30 *Hard case*  
 31 PRO: T1/19, no 30  
 32 PRO: T1/58, no 58  
 33 PRO: WO 51/40 ff 34, 75, 111; WO 51/41, ff 101,107; WO 51/42, ff 30, 32, 99, 109, 112, 125; WO 51/43, ff 30, 54, 77, 93, 126, 132, 143, 159; WO 51/44, ff 30, 31, 34, 153, 156, 157; WO 51/45, ff 65, 113, 134, 155; WO 51/46, ff 67, 116; WO 51/47, ff 137, 143, 146; WO 51/48, ff 46, 102, 105, 116; WO 51/49, ff 29, 65, 92, 114, 160, 164, 169; WO 51/50, ff 41, 64; WO 51/51, ff 29, 54; WO 51/52, ff 52, 63, 71, 85; WO 51/55, f 65  
 34 *Hard case*  
 35 PRO: T70/128, 11 Aug, 3 Nov 1692. I am indebted to Glenys Crocker for information from the Royal African Company records.  
 36 PRO: T1/76, no 61  
 37 PRO: T1/87, nos 27, 125, 127; T1/86, no 112  
 38 *Hard case*; PRO: WO 55/345, f 135  
 39 PRO: T1/124, no 50  
 40 PRO: WO 55/347, f 203  
 41 PRO: T1/244, no 35  
 42 PRO: T1/244, no 35; *Cal SPD*, 1691-2, 219  
 43 Courthope 1835, 211  
 44 Crocker, G, forthcoming; *House of Commons sessional papers of the eighteenth century*, reports and papers 1721, part 2: the inventory of Richard Houlditch, Esq  
 45 Fairclough 1994  
 46 Fairclough 1985; GLRO:Acc 1953, bundle 42, Box SB 37; ERO: D/DU 804/4; GL: 11936/57/85263  
 47 GLRO: Acc 1953, bundle 42, Box SB 37  
 48 *London Gazette*, no 6191

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