



Inquisition “de probatione ætatis” of
Elizabeth, daughter and heiress of
John de Shottesbrok, A.D. 1296-7.

By Mr. Nathaniel Hone.



IN the death of a tenant in capite, the heir, if a minor became a Ward of the King, who received the rents of the estate until the lawful age of the said heir. Therefore, on the determination of a minority a writ was issued for taking the Proof of Age. Twelve men were summoned as a Jury, each of whom stated on oath the particulars of his knowledge and the causes of his remembrance. Besides their genealogical value these Proofs of Age are interesting from the curious events recorded in the evidence, as the *data* by which the several Jurors remember the birth of the child. Sometimes the witnesses had been present at the baptism, and had held the taper or ‘torch’ at the font, or they recollect the day from births or deaths in their own families, or a witness had taken to himself a wife about the same date, or had purchased land or entered on a lawsuit; one man had fetched the midwife, another has entertained the sponsors, while a third fixes the date by the induction of a new Vicar, or the admission of a brother or sister to a Religious house. These Proofs of Age are not very numerous, and are usually found calendared with the Chancery series of Inquisitions post mortem, while some enrolments of them appear on the early King’s Bench Rolls.

25 Ed. I.
Probatio
ætatis
Translation.

Proof of Age of Elizabeth, daughter and one of the heirs of John de Shottesbrok, deceased, taken before the lord King at Westminster, in the octave of St. Michael, in the twenty-fifth year of the reign of King Edward [the first].

Berks. It was commanded the Sheriff that whereas Elizabeth, daughter and one of the heirs of John de Shottesbrok, deceased, who held of the King in chief, said that she was of full age and prayed the King that the lands and tenements which are of her

inheritance, and in the custody of the King until the lawful age of the said Elizabeth, be surrendered to her, for which the King hath given a day to the said Elizabeth, who was born at Shottesbrok and baptized in the Church of the same place, as it is said, to prove her age before the King at this day, to wit, in the Octave of St. Michael, wheresoever [the King shall then be in England] he [the Sheriff] should cause to come before the King at the day aforesaid, so many and such good [and lawful men] by whom the proof aforesaid may be taken, and the truth of the age aforesaid be better known and inquired into. And also he should warn Malcolm of Harlege, the well-beloved clerk of the King, that he should be before the King at the day aforesaid to show if he hath or knoweth anything why the King should not restore to the aforesaid Elizabeth if she be of full age, as to one that is of full age, her inheritance.

And the Sheriff returned at the aforesaid term that he had warned the aforesaid Malcolm, &c., who, on the præmonition made to him, came, and the aforesaid Elizabeth says that she is of full age, and prays that proof of her age may be taken. And the aforesaid Malcolm being present in Court says nothing why the proof aforesaid should be delayed, &c. Therefore the taking of the proof aforesaid is proceeded with.

Bartholomew de Arle, six leagues* distant from Shottesbrok, forty years of age and more, being sworn and carefully examined upon the age aforesaid, says that the aforesaid Elizabeth was born at Shottesbrok, and baptized in the church of the same place, and that about the feast of St. Nicholas [5th December] next ensuing she will be sixteen years of age as he says. And being asked how he knows this says that when John Shottesbrok, father of the aforesaid Elizabeth, whose heiress she is, died, at whose death the Manor of Shottesbrok came into the hand of the lord King, by name of wardship, this Juror was sub-escheator in the County aforesaid, and by command of the King took an inquisition of the age of the said Elizabeth now two years since, by which inquisition he found that she was fourteen years old as he says, and in no other way does he know of the age aforesaid as he says.

William Jordan of Bray, one league from Shottesbrok, forty years old and more, being sworn and carefully examined of the age, birth and baptism of the said Elizabeth, agrees with the previous witness. And being asked how he knows this, says by this, that in the same

* leuca = 1500 paces or 480 perches.

year in which the said Elizabeth was born he married his own wife, Sybill, about the feast of All Saints before the said Elizabeth was born, and by this also that the said Juror was present at the feast of the purification [churching] of the mother of the said Elizabeth, which took place in Christmas week next ensuing, he says that he knows the said Elizabeth is of the age aforesaid, and that he well remembers the premises by reason of the knowledge aforesaid.

John de Bentfelde [Binfield] two leagues from Shottesbrok, aged forty years and more, being sworn, &c., concerning the age aforesaid and baptism of the aforesaid Elizabeth, agrees with the last witness. And being asked how he knows this and remembers the premises, says by this, that the aforesaid John, father of the said Elizabeth, impleaded him the Juror in the Bench at Westminster by a writ of trespass now eighteen years since, and afterwards at the feast of St. Michael now sixteen years since they were agreed. And he says that afterwards in the same year, on the morrow of St. Nicholas, was born the aforesaid Elizabeth. And that he the Juror was present at the feast aforesaid, on the day that the mother of the said Elizabeth was churched. And of this he well knows and remembers by the premises as he says.

William Saddok, of White Waltham, by Shottesbrok, xl. years old and more, being sworn, &c., concerning the age, birth and baptism of the aforesaid Elizabeth, agrees with the previous Juror. And being asked how he knows this says by this that he the Juror in the same year first did service to John, father of the said Elizabeth, and bought one virgate of land in the same vill. And for this also that two years afterwards he gave in marriage Christiana, his daughter, now xiiij. years since. And by this he says he well knows and remembers the age, birth and baptism aforesaid, at which he was present, as he says.

Peter Terry, of Waltham, by Shottesbrok, aged xl. years and more, being sworn, &c., of the age, birth and baptism and other circumstances aforesaid, agrees in all with the previous Juror. And being asked how he knows this says by this, that he was present at the feast of the mother of the said Elizabeth. And of the lapse of time he remembers by this, that he had a certain niece born the same year in which the aforesaid Elizabeth was, and who from the time of her birth has, remained continuously in his house, and to this time does remain, as he says by whose age he well remembers the age of the aforesaid Elizabeth, as he says.

William Terry, of Waltham, by Shottesbroke, aged xl. years and more, being sworn, &c., of the age, birth and baptism and other circumstances, &c., agrees with the last witness, giving as a reason of his knowledge and the lapse of time, this : that he was present at the feast aforesaid. And he has a certain daughter, Emma by name, older by one day than the aforesaid Elizabeth, who was born on St. Nicholas's Day and the said Elizabeth on the morrow. And on St. Nicholas' Day next ensuing she will be xvj. years old, as he says.

Robert Cruchefeld [Crossfield], of Bray, by Shottesbrok, aged xl. years and more, being sworn, &c., of the age, birth and baptism and other circumstances, &c., agrees with the last Juror. And being asked how he knows this, says by this : that the same year in which the said Elizabeth was born his wife, Christiana, died and was buried at Bray on Christmas Eve next coming sixteen years ago. And by this he well knows and remembers of the premises, as he says.

Simon Pypard, of Henton, two leagues from Shottesbrok, aged xl. years and more, being sworn, &c., of the age and other circumstances, agrees with the last Juror. And being asked how he knows this, says that he knows and remembers by this : that he had a certain son, John by name, who died now five years since and was born in the same year as Elizabeth, on the feast of St. John Baptist, as he says. And by no other way does he know, as he says.

John de Indon, of Wokyngham, two leagues from Shottesbrok, aged thirty years and more, being sworn, &c., of the age and other circumstances, agrees, &c. And says that he knows the premises by this : that James de Yeuedon [Eweden?], father of the said Juror, the same year in which the aforesaid Elizabeth was born took certain land at farm of a certain William Terry for a term of xvj. years, which term expired at the feast of St. Michael last past, and the deed of the said farm then cancelled. And by this he well knows and remembers the premises, as he says.

John Bychwode [Beechwood?], of Hurst, one league and a half from Shottesbrok, aged xl. years and more, being sworn, &c., agrees in all with the last Juror, except that he was not present at the feast aforesaid, and says that he well knows and remembers such age of the aforesaid Elizabeth by this : that he married his wife, Alice by name, still living, the same year, at the feast of St. Hilary, as he says.

Edmund Burnel, of Wyndesore, five leagues from Shottesbrok, aged thirty-five years and more, being sworn, &c., of the age and other circumstances, &c., agrees with the last Juror. And being

asked how he knows this, says by this : that he was then in the vill. of Shottesbrok, living in the house of a certain Ralph Smewyne, and by this also he knows and remembers the premises, that he had a certain sister, Alice by name, born the same year, two days after the said Elizabeth. And that the third day after the feast of St. Nicholas she will be xvj. years old, as he says.

Thomas Lyward, of Redding, iiij. leagues from Shottesbrok, aged xl. years and more, being sworn, &c., of the age and other circumstances, agrees, &c., giving as a reason of his knowledge that he was present the day on which she was born and baptized, and by this he remembers the lapse of time, that the same year Sir Robert Ffuks gave certain land in Arle to Robert, son of the said Juror, as he says.

And whereas the aforesaid Elizabeth has sufficiently proved her age before the King and it also seems by the personal appearance [per aspectum corporis] of the said Elizabeth that she is of full age, to wit, xiiij. years. Therefore, the aforesaid Elizabeth may have seizin of the lands and tenements belonging to her of her inheritance, &c.

And record of this is sent to the Chancery.

