



This evening I'm going to tell you a story, one that has mystified the people of this county and elsewhere for nearly 350 years.

First read about it in "Tales of Old Gloucestershire" by Betty Smith.

It intrigued me and I wanted to know more about it. The more I learned about the story, the more frustrated I became that people seemed to have spend the last 350 years speculating idly about what might have happened, but no one seemed to have spent much time investigating the historical facts behind the story.

I therefore set myself the task of researching the background to the story. I don't claim to have made any major discoveries, but I hope you'll find what I have managed to turn up of interest. But first, I need to tell you a story...

The Return of Charles II from exile



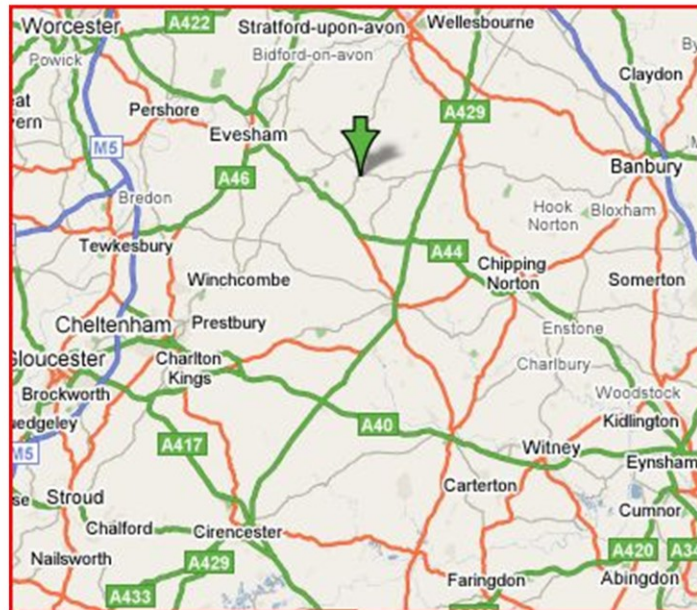
The date is Thursday 16th August 1660. The country is just emerging from 15 years of Civil War and has recently undergone a dramatic regime change with the collapse of the Commonwealth and the return from exile of Charles II less than 3 months earlier.

Chipping Campden



The place is the small market town of Chipping Campden, not somewhere one would normally associate with scandal or mystery.

Chipping Campden



Campden lies in a remote north-east corner of Gloucestershire, about 35 miles from Gloucester and rather closer to Evesham in Worcestershire and Stratford in Warwickshire.

As we shall see later, even sleepy Chipping Campden did not escape its fair share of suffering and conflict during the turbulent period that is just drawing to a close.

“to Charingworth, about two Miles from thence”



That Thursday in August 1660, a man named William Harrison sets off on foot from Campden to walk to the village of Charingworth about four miles away. He is aged about 70 and is steward of the estates belonging to Viscountess Campden in the area. He is going to collect rent money due to his employer.

However, Harrison is late returning, and, becoming concerned, his wife sends her servant, John Perry, to meet his master on the way from Charingworth. Neither Harrison nor Perry returns home that night, so early the next morning, Edward Harrison, William's son, sets off towards Charingworth to look for his father.

Edward meets Perry coming from that village. Perry tells Edward that there is no sign of William Harrison in Charingworth, so together they go first to Ebrington and then on to Paxford, before returning towards Campden. On the way, they hear news that a woman has found a hat, collar band and comb on the main road between Ebrington and Campden. When shown these objects, they recognise them as belonging to William Harrison.

The woman takes them to the place where she found the objects, on the main road between Ebrington and Campden, near a large bank of gorse. They search the area for Mr. Harrison, now fearing that he has been set upon and murdered, for the hat and comb are slashed and cut, and the collar band is bloodstained. But they find no other sign of William Harrison.

Chipping Campden



The news of these discoveries reaches Campden and causes such an alarm in the town that men, women, and children rush out in crowds to search for the body of William Harrison, presuming him dead, but all to no avail. No body is to be found.

Suspicion quickly falls on the servant John Perry because he did not come home after being sent to find Harrison. So the next day Perry is brought before a Justice of the Peace, who questions him about his master's absence, and why he himself had stayed out the night he went to meet him. Perry's statement hardly helps his position, for it is vague and unconvincing. He claims to have spent the night in Harrison's hen house because he was afraid of the dark. Three people that Perry claims to have spoken to testify to the truth of his statement, insofar as it concerns them, but nonetheless, he is detained in custody at a local inn.

Rumours start to circulate that Perry has been telling stories in gaol that suggest he knows more than he's letting on. Further searches of the area for the body turn up nothing.

On Friday 24th August, Perry is again questioned by the magistrate and asked if he is now ready to confess what has happened to his master. Perry finally concedes that Harrison was indeed murdered, but not by him. When pressed, Perry states that it was his own mother and his brother that had murdered his master.

Perry tells the magistrate how his mother and his brother had pestered him ever since he came into his master's service to help them get money out of Harrison. They told him how poor they were and that it was in his power to relieve them, by warning them in advance when his master was going to go and collect his employer's rent money. They planned to attack him on the road and rob him.

Chipping Campden



Perry goes on to tell of how he had informed his brother Richard on the morning of the 16th August that Harrison would be going out to collect the rent money that day. Richard had intercepted Harrison on his way back from Charingworth and strangled him while John and his mother looked on. They had thrown the body into a cesspool near Berrington Mill. It had been John who had planted the objects in the road, having cut them with his knife to make it look like Harrison had been killed by highwaymen.

Joan Perry, John Perry's mother, and Richard Perry, his brother, are immediately arrested and a search is made of the pool where John said that Harrison's body had been thrown, but again nothing is found. The fishpools in Campden are dragged and the ruins of Campden House are ransacked, but all again to no avail.

On Saturday 25th August, Joan and Richard Perry, together with John Perry, are brought before the Justice of Peace, and informed of the allegations John has made about them. They deny everything. John, on the other hand, continues to assert their guilt, and, moreover, accuses Richard of having been responsible for a break-in at Harrison's house the previous year, in which £140 had been stolen and for which no one had ever been apprehended.

John Perry is also questioned about a curious incident that had happened a few weeks previously when he had caused a disturbance one evening in Campden garden. He had been found running around, apparently terrified, with a pitchfork in his hand. At that time, he had told a tall tale about how he had been set upon by two men in white bearing swords and how he had defended himself with his pitchfork, the handle of which was cut in two or three places, as was a key in his pocket, something he claimed had been done by one of their swords.

This story, John Perry now admits, he had made up because they were planning to rob Harrison and wanted people to believe there were thieves in the neighbourhood.





Sir Robert Hyde,
Judge at the Perrys'
second trial

By the time of the next assizes the following spring, no body has still been found, and John, Joan, and Richard Perry are tried on the second indictment of murder by the new the Assize Judge, Sir Robert Hyde, and each of them pleads Not Guilty to this charge. When several witnesses testify in person to the court that they had heard John's confession to the Justice of the Peace, John now claims that he had been mad at the time and did not know what he was saying.

Nonetheless, all three are found guilty and sentenced to hang.

A few days later they are taken to the place of their execution, on Broadway Hill, within view of Campden. Joan, the mother, who, it would appear, is popularly reckoned to be a witch and thought to have bewitched her sons so that they could not confess to anything while she was alive, is executed first in the hope that the spell will break and the sons will confess and reveal the whereabouts of Harrison's body. But no, Richard hangs next and continues to affirm his innocence and that he knows nothing about Mr. Harrison's death or what has happened to him. Before he dies, Richard begs his brother to tell people what he knows about Harrison, for the satisfaction of the whole world and for his own conscience, but John remains silent. Now it is John's turn to mount the scaffold, and he announces sullenly to the crowd that he is not obliged to confess anything to them, but on the point of death, he declares that he knows nothing about his master's disappearance, but they might possibly hear afterwards.



The Campden Wonder

A Gloucestershire Mystery

Some two years later, news of what has happened to Mr William Harrison does indeed reach the people of Chipping Campden. Harrison is alive and well.

In a letter to a local magistrate, William Harrison gives his account of where he has been for the last two years since his sudden disappearance. But his story is hardly an explanation, for it asks more questions than it answers.

“...in the narrow Passage amongst Ebrington Furzes...”



This is how Harrison's own story goes. That day in August 1660, the tenants are busy in the fields and he manages to collect only £23.

However, as he is returning home, “in the narrow passage amongst Ebrington furzes”, he is intercepted by three unknown horsemen. Harrison is seriously wounded, has his wrists bound and is forced to ride pillion behind one the horsemen, who take him on a long cross-country journey which eventually takes him the following Sunday

“...to a Place by the Sea-side, called Deal...”



“to a place by the sea-side, called Deal”, in Kent, where he is loaded on to a ship captained by a man named Wrenshaw.

He is not alone on the ship, as there are a number of other people “in the same condition” as he puts it.

“...three Turkish Ships...”



After about 6 weeks at sea, they encounter three Turkish ships and the prisoners are transferred to one of them. Some while later, they land and the prisoners are sold off as slaves, each according to his skills or profession.

“...who lived near to Smyrna...”

Smyrna



Harrison declares that he has some skill in medicine and is sold to (I quote) “a grave Physician of Eighty-seven Years of Age, who lived near to Smyrna, who had formerly been in England, and knew Crowland in Lincolnshire, which he preferred before all other Places in England: He employed me to keep his Still-house, and gave me a silver Bowl, double gilt, to drink in.”

Harrison claims to have served this extraordinary master for about a year and three quarters before his master fell sick, told him he was going to die and invited him to fend for myself. When the physician does indeed die a few days later, Harrison hurries off with his bowl to a nearby port and manages eventually to sell his bowl in exchange for passage to Portugal on a ship out of Hamburg.

On arrival in Lisbon, Harrison has the good fortune to run into an Englishman from Wisbech who takes pity on him and pays for a passage back to Dover, and thence to London and back to Chipping Campden.



What are we to make of this bizarre tale?

It is almost impossible to avoid the temptation to start speculating about what might nearly have happened.

Almost nobody in that time has believed Harrison's story about being abducted by mysterious horsemen and sold in slavery in Turkey. Where was he really?

And why did John Perry confess to having murdered him? If this is a case of false confession syndrome or Munchausen's, why involve his own mother and brother in the fantasy?

For nearly 350 years since William Harrison's disappearance, people have tried and failed to piece together the various aspects of this story into a credible explanation of what was really going on. It struck me that to understand these events better, we needed to delve behind the story as it is normally told, and try to discover the historical truth behind it.

I don't claim to have been particularly successful. But let's see if I've been able to shed any light on the case at all.



William Grevel's memorial



William Grevel's house

In the Middle Ages, like many Cotswold towns, Chipping Campden derived its prosperity mainly from the wool trade. In the 14th century, William Grevel, one of the foremost wool merchants in the land, lived in the town, and around 1380 he built a fine house there which still stands today. The Latin inscription on his memorial in the parish church of St. James, when translated, reads *"Here lies William Grevel of Campden, formerly a citizen of London and flower of the wool merchants of all England, who died on the first day of October A.D. 1401"*.

However, over the years, as successive kings sought funds to fight their various wars, restrictions on the wool trade were imposed and a system grew up under which wool could only be exported through a limited number of places known as the staple towns. When Chipping Campden petitioned the King in 1617 to become a staple town, its application was refused. This effectively sounded the death knell for the wool trade in the borough and the prosperity which the trade had brought died with it.

Campden was fortunate enough to have a wealthy benefactor to help it through these difficult times. In 1610, the manor had been acquired by Sir Baptist Hicks, a successful London mercer.

Sir Baptist Hicks



Baptist Hicks was born in 1551, the third and youngest son of Robert Hicks and Juliana Arthurs. Robert Hicks was a mercer, that is to say a dealer in textiles, and had family links with Bristol and Gloucestershire, but his commercial base appears to have been in the Cheapside district of London.

The young Baptist Hicks was probably educated at the St. Paul's School. In his will he provided scholarships for pupils of this school to study at Trinity College Cambridge, where he himself had enrolled in 1568. In 1573 he became a student at the Inner Temple, but there is no record of his ever having practiced law. It is clear that at some point Baptist moved into his father's trade and took over the running of Robert's shop at the White Bear in Cheapside, which appears to have been located somewhere in the area of Bread Street and Soper Lane. He was admitted as a freeman of the Mercers' Company in 1580, a body of which he would be master no fewer than four times.

In 1584 he married Elizabeth, the daughter of Richard May of London. Two sons and three daughters were born to Baptist and Elizabeth between 1586 and 1594, but both sons and one of the daughters died in infancy, leaving just Juliana(or Julian) the eldest daughter and her sister Mary.

John Milton's Plaque in Bread Street



John Milton the poet is said to have been born in a house called "White Bear" on Bread Street that was sublet from a Baptist Hicks. One imagines that when Hicks became too grand to live above his shop any more, it was rented to the Milton family.



William Cecil, Lord Burghley.

Sir Baptist's brother Michael served as secretary to Cecil and helped his brother gain access to Court circles.

Sir Baptist's elder brother Michael (1543-1612) was perhaps even more influential and powerful, if less wealthy, than Baptist himself. Michael was secretary to William Cecil, Lord Burghley. Burghley served Queen Elizabeth for forty years first as secretary and then as lord treasurer between 1558 and 1598. Burghley had great influence at Court and as his secretary Michael Hicks was also able to pull a few strings when necessary.

With Michael's help, Baptist managed to win the right to supply the Court with silks and other valuable textiles. When Elizabeth I died, he received an order worth £3,000 to provide "velvets, damasks and satins of the colour crimson, to serve the coronation" of the new King James I and on 24th July 1603 Baptist Hicks was knighted for his services.

Despite this advancement, he continued in his trade and was indeed something of a social innovator, becoming one of the first knights of the realm to run a shop. Strype says that "Sir Baptist was one of the first citizens that, after knighthood, kept their shops, and, being charged with it by some of the aldermen, he gave this answer, first—'That his servants kept the shop, though he had a regard to the special credit thereof; and that he did not live altogether upon the interest, as most of the aldermen did, laying aside their trade after knighthood.'"



King James I

Hicks made his fortune supplying textiles to the Court and lending money to courtiers.

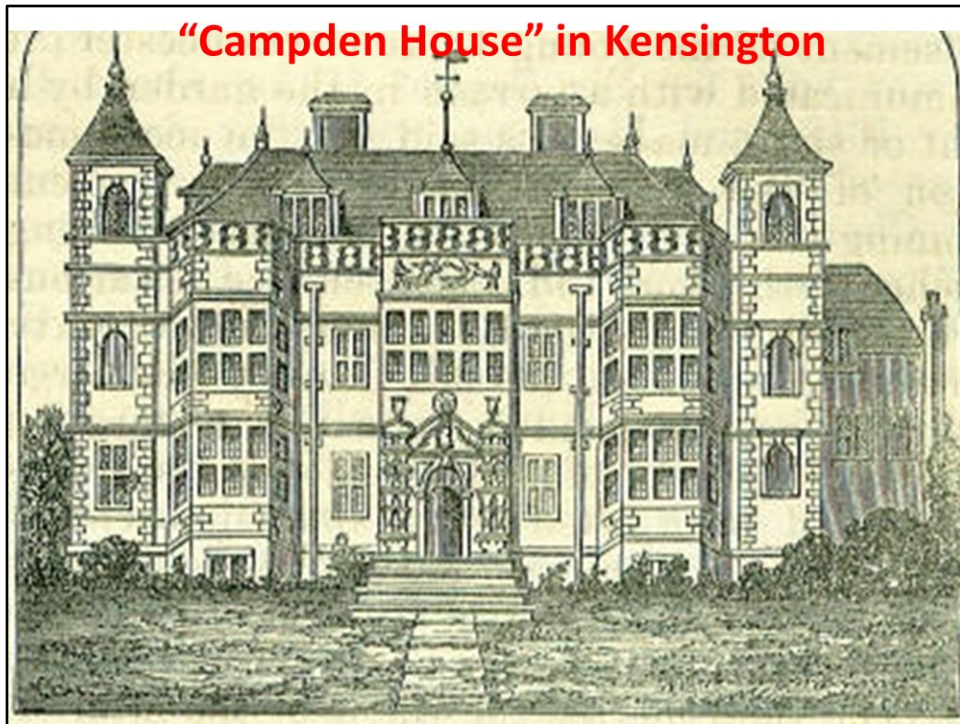
However, the textile trade was far from his only source of income. Sir Baptist was also a money-lender, making loans of up to £150,000 (an immense sum in those days –equivalent to many tens of millions today) to various creditors, including the King himself. On occasions, it is clear that Hicks was sailing pretty close to the wind in his financial dealings. The King and his courtiers were very good at borrowing money, not so good at paying it back. In letters to his brother Michael, Baptist complains that the Scots are “fayre speakers and slow performers,” and refuses to give them any more credit.

Nonetheless, the risks he ran paid off. One further token of James’s gratitude was that he granted Hicks the Church property and impropriation of a certain parish of Cheltenham and chapelry of Charlton Kings.

Hicks speculative lending led to the accumulation of a vast fortune, which enabled him to invest in ventures overseas too. He was a prominent member of the Virginia Company, and the Second Charter of Virginia dated 1609 bears his name. In 1612 Hicks was active in the company of speculators which purchased Bermuda (then known as the Somers Isles).

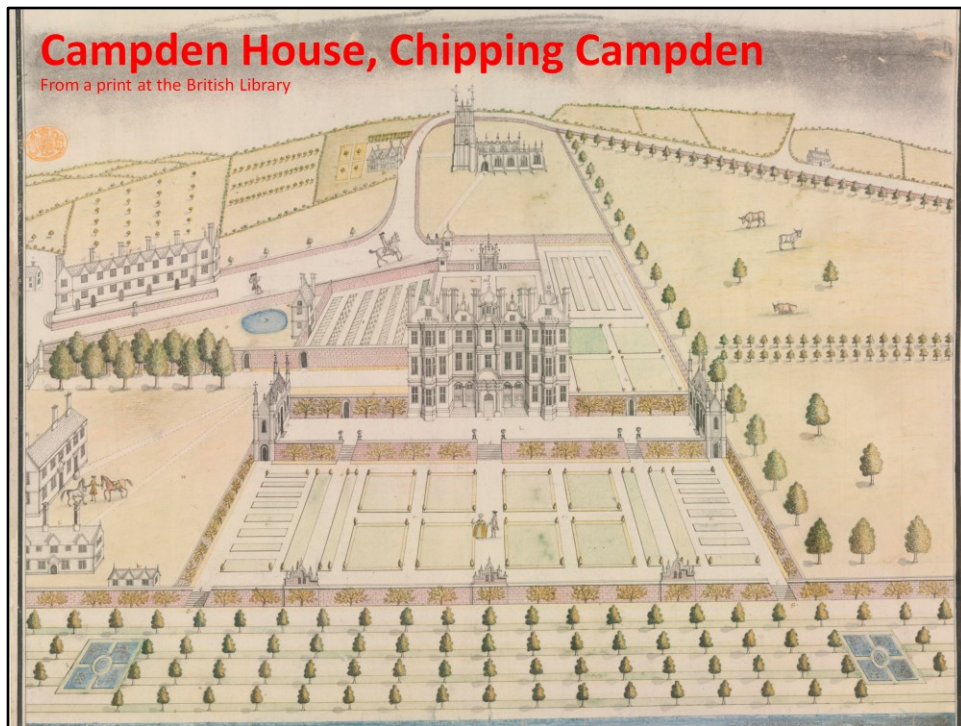
Given Hicks’ involvement with the Virginia Company, it is interesting to note that Ralph Hamor, the author of *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia* grew up in the house next to the one John Milton’s family leased from Sir Baptist in Cheapside.

Despite his humble origins, Sir Baptist’s rapidly growing wealth opened many doors for him and led him to positions of authority outside of the world of commerce. In 1606, for example, he was foreman of the jury at the Guildhall which convicted the Jesuit Father Henry Garnet of complicity in the Gunpowder Plot.

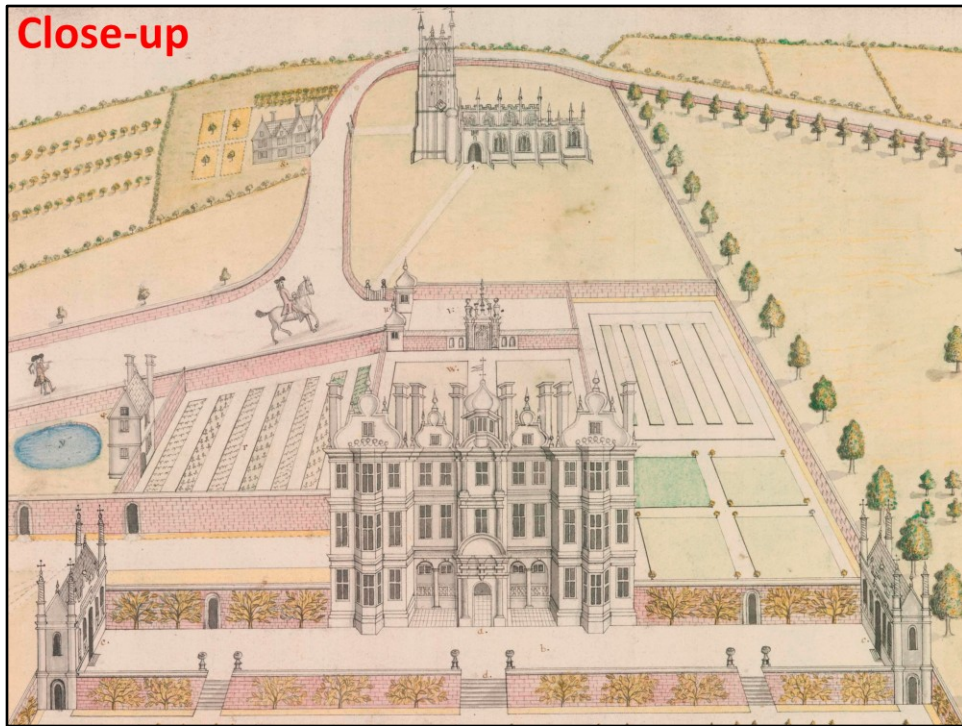


By now he was one of the wealthiest men in the country and could afford a fine town house. The house in Kensington later known as "Campden House" was built for Sir Baptist about 1612; and his arms, with that date, and those of his son-in-law, Edward Lord Noel, and Sir Charles Morison, were emblazoned upon a large bay-window of the house.

The house was destroyed by fire on the morning of Sunday, March 23, 1862.



Hicks also clearly felt he needed a country seat that reflected his affluence and importance. In March 1610, he purchased the manors of “Campden, Chipping Campden, Broade Campden and Berrington”. On a piece of land adjoining the church, he built Campden House, one of the finest and most sumptuous mansions of its age, set in grounds and gardens extending over eight acres. The façade alone was said to have cost £29,000, the furnishings £15,000 – many millions at today’s values.



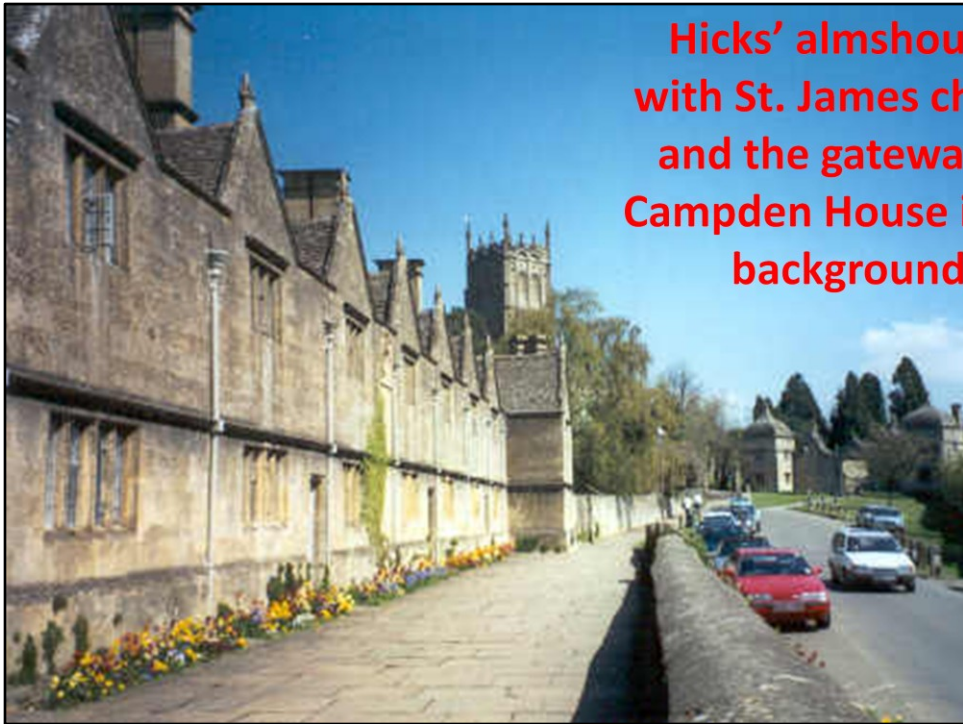
In 1613 he purchased the living of Campden (that is, the right to appoint the vicar of the parish church) and over the following years extended his possessions to include a large amount of land in and around Chipping Campden as well as elsewhere in Gloucestershire and other counties.



Tragically, only thirty years later, it was a smoking ruin. In 1643 the house was occupied by Royalist troops. Under the command of Sir Henry Bard, the garrison terrorised the neighbourhood and plundered whatever they could find in the town.

There are several references in the historical record to the hardships endured by the townsfolk during this period. For example, in 1644, the account book of the Chipping Campden Grammar School reports that the governors of the school charity gave 5 shillings to “good man Hurlston’s wife pillaged by the soldiers of all her goods”. Of the occupation of Campden House, Rushen says “Sir Henry Bard kept possession of it for several months, during which period, the townspeople and husbandmen in the vicinity must have grown to hate him, and possibly his cause also, by reason of the unwarrantable and unnecessary devastation wrought by his orders throughout the district.”

Great damage is said to have been done to Sir Baptist’s Hicks fine house even before 1645, when the troops were withdrawn and the house set ablaze, for reasons and in circumstances which have never been fully explained.



Hicks' almshouse
with St. James church
and the gatehouse
Campden House in
background

Fifteen years later, when William Harrison set off to collect overdue rents from Lady Campden's tenants, Hicks' once magnificent mansion can have been no more than a heap of robbed out stones in a rapidly decaying untended garden.

Only the gatehouse – here seen in the distance to the right of the parish church of St. James - and the two banqueting houses survived intact, as they do to this day, hinting at the splendour of the great house to which they were once no more than outbuildings.



St. James Church



Gateway to Campden House





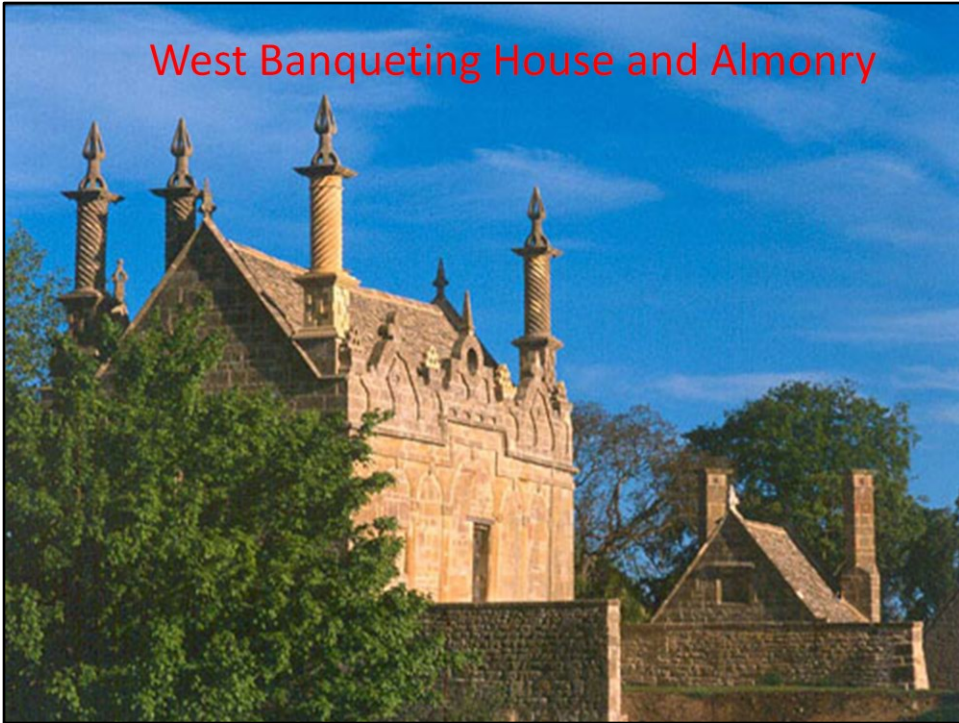
East banqueting house

West Banqueting House and Church



East banqueting house

West Banqueting House and Almonry

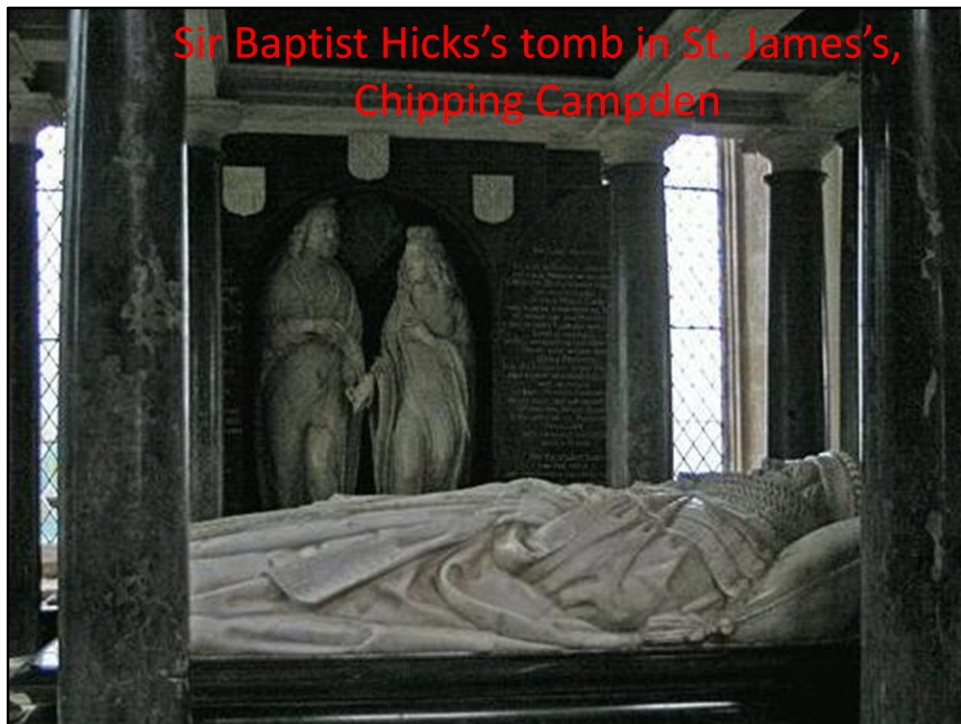




The banqueting houses are now owned by the Landmark Trust and you can go and stay there if you wish.

On 1 July 1620 Sir Baptist Hicks was made a baronet. Later that year he became a Member of Parliament for the first time, when he was elected M.P. for Tavistock, but it was Tewkesbury that he represented in the parliaments of 1624, 1625, 1626, and 1628. He was also Lord Lieutenant of Middlesex in 1625.

On 5 May 1628 Baptist Hicks was raised by Charles I to the peerage as Baron Hicks of Ilmington, Warwickshire, and Viscount Campden of Campden, Gloucestershire. Since he had no surviving son, it was stipulated that his son-in-law, Edward Noel, Lord Noel of Ridlington, Rutlandshire, husband of his eldest daughter Juliana, would inherit the titles at his death.



Hicks died, aged 78, on 18th October 1629, and was buried at St. James Chipping Campden, where this magnificent marble monument to his memory can still be seen today.

His funeral oration was read by John Gaule. Ironically, as we shall see, Gaule later was to become a critic of the witch-hunts of Matthew Hopkins in the 1640s, complaining in "Select Cases of Conscience" that "Every old woman with a wrinkled face, a furrowed brow, a hairy lip, a gobbler tooth, a squint eye, a squeaking voice or scolding tongue, having a rugged coat on her back, a skull-cap on her head, a spindle in her hand and a dog or cat by her side, is not only suspect but pronounced for a witch".

Gaule's sycophantic eulogy for Sir Baptist tells us little about the life of the man himself. It was published as "A Defiance to Death Being The Funebrious Commemoration of the Right Honourable, Baptist Lord Hickes, Viscount Camden, late deceased Preached at Camden in Gloucester-shire, November 8, 1629". It is mainly of interest for the list of charitable donations that it includes as an appendix, claiming that "What he hath bestowed to pious and charitable uses amount to more than £11000".

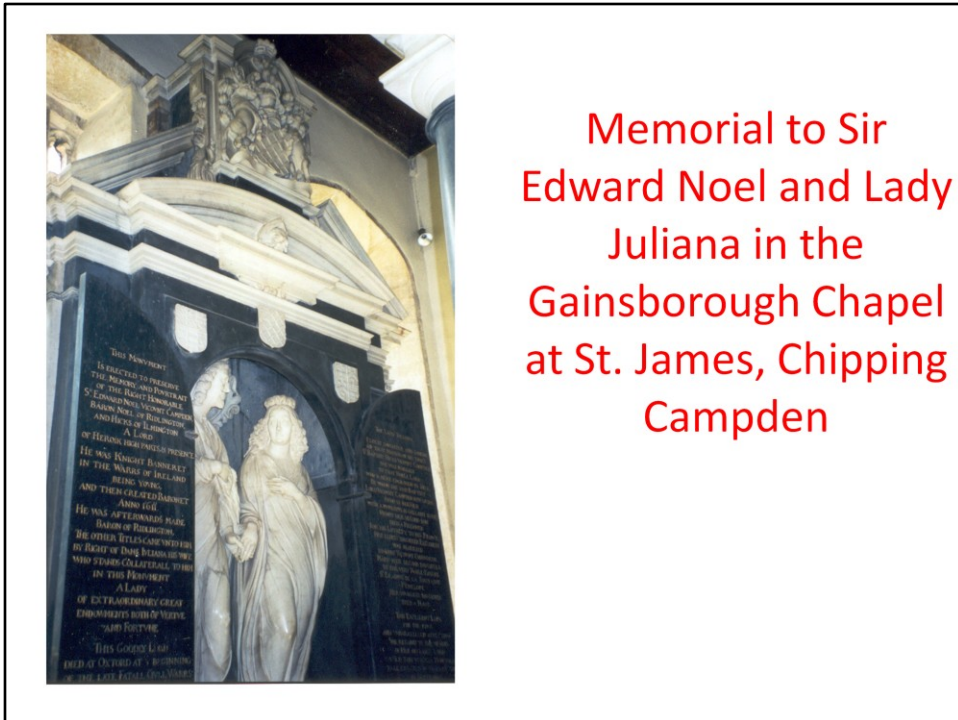
Most interesting of all though, are perhaps the two pieces of Latin verse that end Gaule's publication. Entitled "Prosopopoea (sic) Latinis lambis" and "Epitaphium", these bear the name "Henricus Noel" and are therefore probably the work of Hicks' grandson, Henry. They both suggest strongly that Hicks had been a great traveller in his younger days. For example, the latter includes the lines:

He who, sailing the oceans,
Familiar with so many
Of this wide world's shores,
Knew every path of earth and sea

Little is known about Hicks' early life. As an importer of exotic textiles, his trade would clearly have involved him in dealing with merchants from overseas and it is quite possible that he did himself travel widely abroad. In Bishop Benson's Survey of the Diocese of Gloucester, 1735-1750 (written over 100 years after Sir Baptist's death), it is stated that Hicks traded with Turkey and that he had at one time been taken prisoner by the "Moors". Whilst incarcerated, Hicks is said to have vowed to give £5,000 to charity if he ever returned to England. Within a few hours of making this vow, so the report goes, he was set free and, on his return, was not only true to his word, but indeed, gave over £10,000 to charitable causes. This sum is also mentioned on his epitaph in St. James, Chipping Campden and is roughly consistent with the £11,000 mentioned in Gaule's eulogy.

There is no doubt that Hicks was a major contributor to charities of various kinds, both in Chipping Campden and elsewhere. What truth, if any, however, there is in this story of Hicks having been a prisoner of the Turks, which appears only in an obscure report written a long time after his death, is unclear. Whether it is true or not, it seems to have some connection with the Campden Wonder story, as we shall see shortly.

Hicks is a fascinating character in his own right. His influence on Chipping Campden is strongly in evidence even today. In 1660, only 30 years or so after his death, his family was still the dominant force in the town.



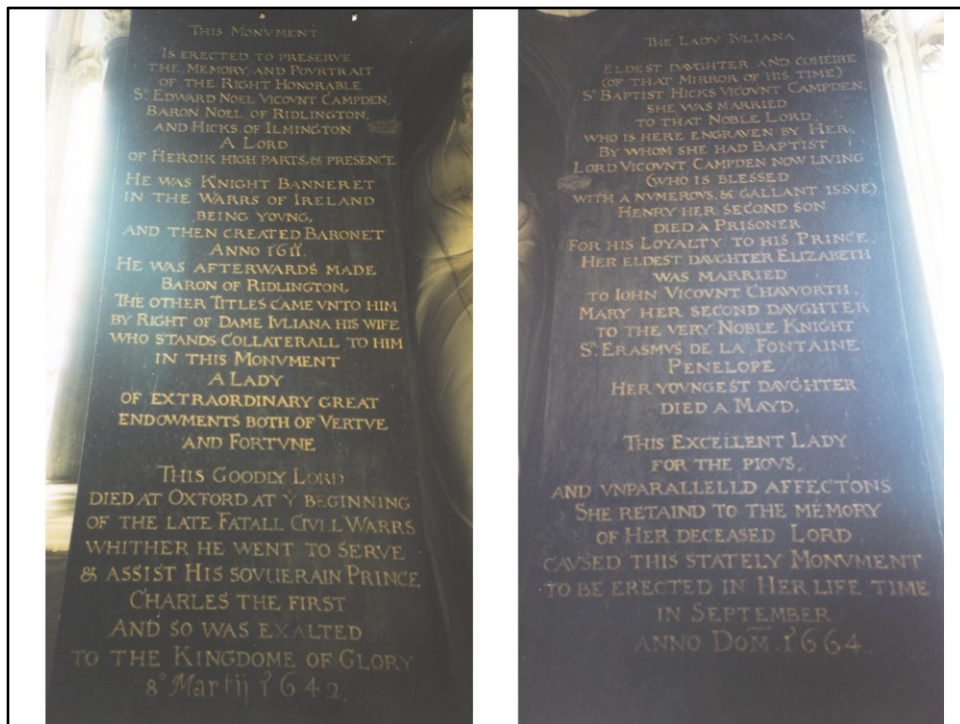
Memorial to Sir Edward Noel and Lady Juliana in the Gainsborough Chapel at St. James, Chipping Campden

After Sir Baptist's death, since there was no male heir, his estate was shared between the two surviving daughters Juliana and her younger sister Mary, wife of Sir Charles Morrison, but Sir Baptist's titles were inherited by Juliana's husband Sir Edward Noel, Baron Ridlington, and subsequently passed down through the Noel family, who later became Earls of Gainsborough.

Sir Edward Noel was the eldest son and heir of Sir Andrew Noel of Brooke, Rutlandshire. He was admitted to Sidney College Cambridge in November 1598, gaining his B.A. 1599-1600. According to his memorial in Campden church, he fought in Elizabeth's Irish wars. He was M.P. for Rutland in 1601, knighted in 1602, Sheriff of Rutland 1608-9, made a baronet in 1611 and given the title Baron Noel of Ridlington in 1617.

Edward and Juliana had five children. As well as Baptist Noel, his eldest son, the third Viscount Campden, who is discussed below, his second son Henry also fought on the Royalist side in the Civil War. Henry was taken prisoner in March 1643 and died in captivity only a few months after his father.

Like his sons, Edward Noel, was a dedicated and prominent supporter of the Royalist cause. He died on 8th March 1643 in the king's quarters at Oxford and was buried at Chipping Campden. His widow Juliana erected a fine monument to his memory in a wing of the church in 1664.



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Memorial to
Baptist Noel,
third Viscount
Campden, at
Exton,
Rutlandshire.

Their first son, Sir Baptist Noel was baptised at Brooke, Rutlandshire, on 13th October 1611 appears to have distinguished himself rapidly, rising from captain to colonel and then to brigadier in only a few months during the course of 1643. The troops under his command became known as “Campdeners” and acquired a reputation for ill discipline during a campaign in which they seem to have rampaged around and terrorised the east midland. In June 1643, they plundered Sir William Armyn's house at Osgodby. On 19 July 1643, they had taken Stamford and were threatening Peterborough.

In 1645 Baptist Noel was a prisoner in London. Although released in August 1646, his estates were sequestered and a large fine imposed for his actions in opposition to Parliament. Throughout the period of the Commonwealth, he appears to have been in constant money trouble and a persistent thorn in the flesh of Cromwell's regime.

At the Restoration he was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Rutland, on 9th August 1660, only a week before his mother's steward William Harrison disappeared from Chipping Campden. He died at the family estates at Exton, Rutlandshire, on 29 October 1683. An imposing monument to his memory, sculpted by Grinling Gibbons, stands in the north aisle of Exton Church.

Sir Baptist Noel, third Viscount Campden, had a reputation as a man of dissolute ways. In his youth he is said to have lost £2,600 “at tennis in one day ... to my Lord of Carnarvon, Lord Rich, and other gallants”. He was married no fewer than four times and fathered a total of nineteen children legitimately, as well, most probably as a number of others.

Some have conjectured that William Harrison's disappearance was in some way connected with Sir Baptist Noel's pro-Royalist activities or his wild lifestyle, speculating that Harrison had been sent abroad to take money to his mistress's son, or to carry out some other errand. Both Jeremy Potter and Victoria Bennett propose “solutions” of this kind. However, the seventy-year-old steward of his mother's country estates would seem a strange choice for such an assignment. Furthermore, the steward is always described as his mother's employee and there is nothing in the historical record to link Harrison in any way with Sir Baptist Noel.

On the other hand, it would be interesting to know more about the effects of the sequestration of the Noel estates on affairs in Chipping Campden. What did this mean for the collection of rents from the Campden tenants, for example? It is likely that the Noels had recently been restored to their estates in 1660, and it is even conceivable that the rent money which Harrison was attempting to collect – in August, unusually – may have been the first such collection for some years. Were the Noels perhaps demanding back-payment of several years' money and is this why Harrison was expecting such a “considerable sum”? No doubt, even fifteen years later, there was still lingering hostility towards the Royalist cause among the local tenants who will not have completely forgotten how they suffered at the hands of Sir Henry Bard's troops when they were occupying Campden House. Perhaps this is relevant in some way.



After Sir Edward's death in 1643, Juliana now known as Viscountess dowager of Campden, continued to live at Brooke, where she is said to have "maintained great state and dispensed much hospitality" (DNB). It is doubtful whether she ever spent any extended period of time in Chipping Campden.

Juliana died at Brooke on 26 Nov. 1680, and was buried in the family tomb in St James' Chipping Campden on 12 Jan. 1681

So when Sir Thomas Overbury's Account of the Campden Wonder mentions William Harrison's "mistress", the lady in question was his employer as steward of the Campden estates, Lady Juliana, Countess Campden.

**THE
POWER OF WITCHCRAFT
BEING**

*A most strange but true Relation
of the most miraculous and wonderful
deliverance of one Mr. William
Harrison, of Cambden, in the County
of Gloucester, Steward to the Lady
Nowell*

*Who was supposed to have been murdered by his own Servant, and his Servants
Mother and Brother: But to the amazement of all people that live near the said
place, the truth is now brought to light; and Mr. Harrison after above two years
absence is returned into his own Country and place of abode in Cambden.
The manner how he was bewitched away, and the manner of his safe return back
again into his own Countrey you shall hear in this following Discourse.
London printed for Charles Tyus at the three Bibles on London-bridge, 1662.*

The earliest known account of the story occurs in a pamphlet published by Charles Tyus at the Three Bibles on London Bridge, housed at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Since it is dated 1662, it seems highly likely that it was written within just a few months of Harrison's return home. The precise date of his return is unclear. In an almanac, again belonging to Anthony Wood and now also preserved at the Bodleian, a note of Harrison's return is written opposite the date 6th August 1662. However, the pamphlet refers to Harrison's having been absent "above two years", which, if it can be trusted, would suggest a return no earlier than 16th August 1662. Whatever the exact date, it is probable that the pamphlet does not post-date Harrison's return by more than 3 or 4 months.

The tone of the pamphlet is moralistic. It ends with a diatribe against witchcraft and a set of biblical references to the existence and iniquity of witches.

The most remarkable feature of this account is that the Perrys are assumed to be guilty, and Harrison's reappearance is explained on the basis that he had not been murdered, as had been supposed, but merely spirited away by means of Joan Perry's witchcraft to far off Turkey, whence he had been just as miraculously returned by means of God's grace and providence.

Today, faced with a miscarriage of justice of this kind, we might be inclined to rail against the incompetence of the judiciary and the inadequacies of the legal process. In public at least, the 17th-century response seems to have been to single Joan Perry out as a scapegoat, praise God and condemn Satan.

Truth brought to Light:

OR,

Wonderful strange and true news from Gloucester shire, concerning one Mr. William Harrison, formerly Stewart to the Lady Nowell of Cambden, who was supposed to be Murthered by the Widow Pery and two of her Sons, one of which was Servant to the said Gentleman. Therefore they were all three apprehended and sent to Gloucester Goal, and about two years since arraigned, found guilty, condemned, and Executed upon Broadway hill in sight of Cambden, the mother and one Son being then buried under the Gibbet, but he that was Mr. Harrisons Servant, hanged in Chains in the same place, where that which is remaining of him may be seen to this day, but at the time of their Execution, the said Mr. Harrison was not dead, but ere seven years were over should be heard of again, yet would not confess where he was, but now it appears the Widow Pery was a witch, and after her Sons had robd him} and cast him into a Stone Pit, she by her witch.-craft conveyed him upon a Rock in the Sea near Turky, where he remained four days and nights, till a Turkish Ship coming by took him and sold him into Turky, where he remained for a season, but is now through the good providence of God returnd again safe to England, to the great wonder and admiration of all that know the same. This is undenyably true, as is sufficiently testified by Inhabitants of Cambden, and many others thereabouts.

To the Tune of, Aim not too high

Amongst those wonders which on earth are shown,
In any age there seldom hath been known,
A thing more strange then that which this Relation,
Doth here present unto your observation.

In Glocestershire as many know full well,
At Cambden Town a Gentleman did dwell,
One Mr. William Harrison by name,
A Stewart to a Lady of great fame.

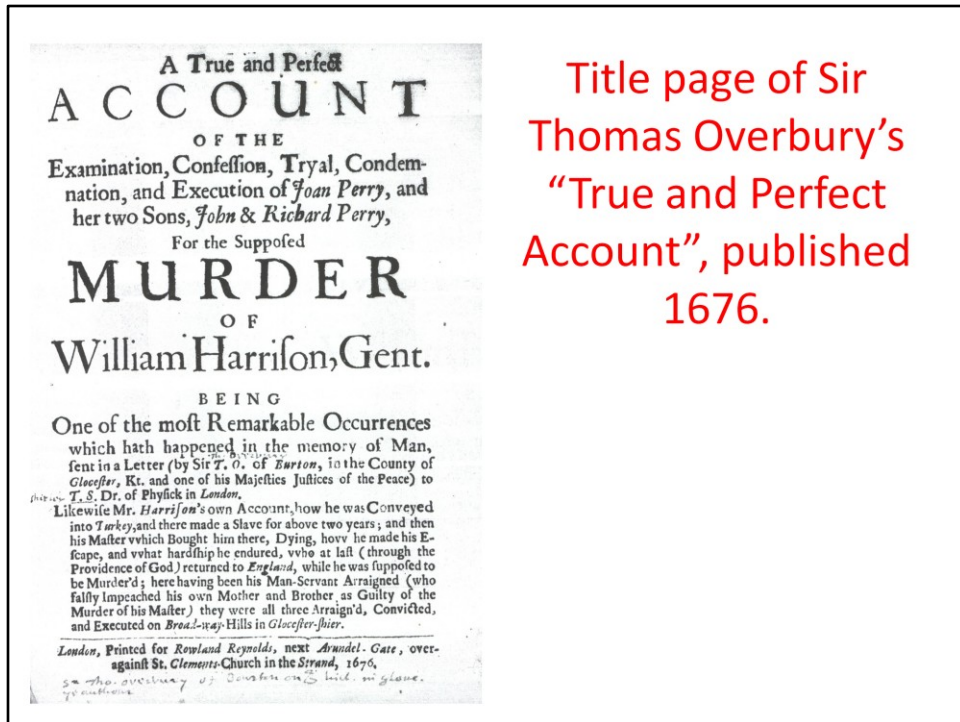
A Widdow likewise in the Town there was,
A wicked wretch who brought strange things to pass,
So wonderful that some will scarce receive,
These lines for truth nor yet my words believe.

But such as unto Cambden do resort,
They surely found this is no false report,
Though many lies are dayly now invented,
This is as true a Song as ere was Printed.



The ballad is set to an ancient tune known variously as "Dr Faustus", "Aim not too high" and "Fortune my Foe".

It is basically a re-telling in verse form of the story as recounted in Tyus's pamphlet, with the same emphasis on the Perrys' guilt and Joan's witchcraft in particular.



The Chipping Campden parish registers include, on 28th November 1672, the burial of one "Mr William Harrison", and it is very likely that this is the protagonist of our story. He seems to have gone to his grave having revealed nothing further of his adventures. Four years later, in 1676, Sir Thomas Overbury a magistrate from Bourton on the Hill, published what has been ever since the canonical version of the story.

It bore the characteristically wordy title "A true and perfect account of the Examination, Confession, Trial, Condemnation, and Execution of *Joan Perry*, and her two sons, *John* and *Richard Perry*, for the supposed Murder of *William Harrison*, Gent. being one of the most remarkable Occurrences which hath happened in the Memory of Man"

It seems almost certain that Overbury was himself the magistrate involved in investigating Harrison's disappearance. One is tempted to view Overbury's Account as his attempt to set the record straight after nearly 20 years of confabulation. Unlike many in his age, Overbury appears to have been a man who prized reason and tolerance. His "True and Perfect Account" can be viewed almost as his case memoirs, in which he tries to give the hard facts of the incident and wide away the layer of fantasy and superstition that it has accumulated in the preceding years.



Bourton House,
Bourton on the
Hill.

The house was
rebuilt by Sir
Nicholas Overbury,
grandfather of the
author of the
“Account” in 1598.

Sir Thomas Overbury, author of the True and Perfect Account, was the son of Sir Giles Overbury of Bourton on the Hill and Anne Sherley. The Overbury's were people of some substance in this part of England. Their name would certainly have been well known in the area and elsewhere – though not always for reasons they would have desired.

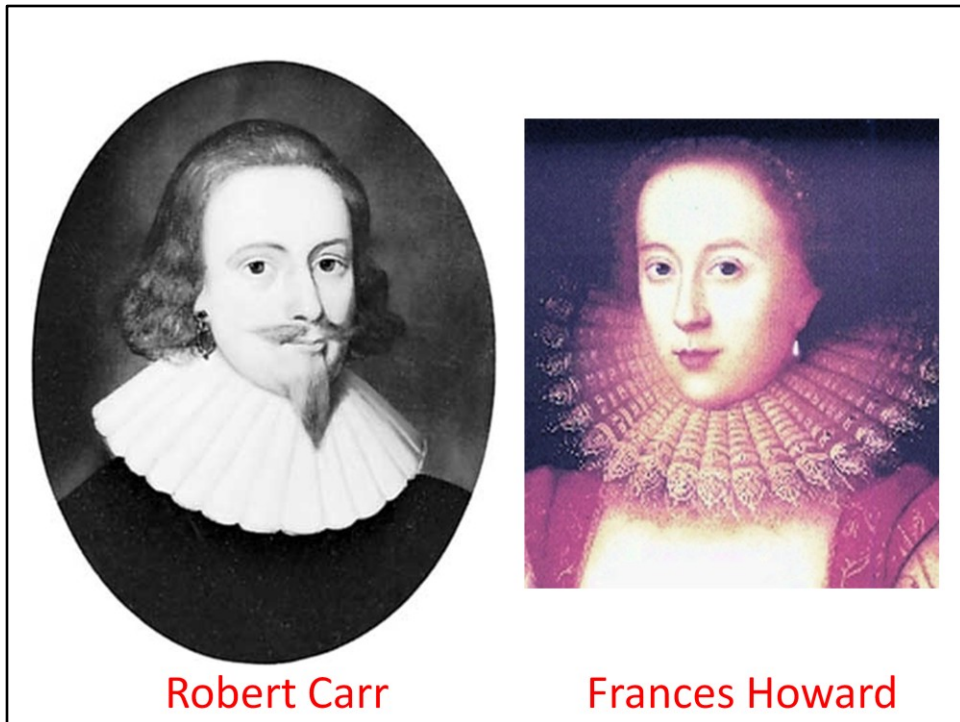
Sir Thomas's grandfather, Sir Nicholas Overbury (ca. 1549-1643) was a lawyer, who studied at the Middle Temple, and rose through the ranks of his profession to become a judge in Wales and later recorder of Gloucestershire. Sir Nicholas had three sons who survived into adulthood. Sir Giles (1590-1653), father of the author of the account of the Campden Wonder, was his second son. A third son, Sir Walter (1593-1637) was twice M.P. for Cardigan. But it was Sir Nicholas's first son, also called Sir Thomas, who brought the family its most lasting fame, or rather perhaps, notoriety.



Sir Thomas
Overbury, poet,
uncle of the
author of the
“True and
Perfect Account”,
poisoned in the
Tower of London,
1613.

This Sir Thomas, uncle of the author of the Account, was the first in the family to display literary talents. A gifted poet, he would probably be best remembered for his essay in verse “A Wife”, which describes the attributes of the perfect spouse, if it were not for the mysterious and scandalous circumstances in which he met his tragic end.

He became embroiled in a complicated love triangle with Robert Carr, widely assumed to have been the sometime homosexual lover of the King, and Carr’s fiancée Frances Howard, countess of Essex. On 26th April, 1613, Thomas Overbury the poet was sent to the Tower on the orders of James himself, but this was not enough for Frances Howard, who then preceded to pay his gaoler to poison him over several months. It is said that Overbury’s food was laced with arsenic and mercury and he was fed tarts doctored with a variety of bizarre substances including sulphuric acid, “powder of diamonds”, something called “great spiders” and cantharides or “Spanish fly”. The young poet faded and, on 15th September 1613, died and was buried at the Tower, presumed dead of natural causes.



Less than two years later, the Secretary of State, Sir Ralph Winwood, learned the truth about Overbury's death from information given by a boy employed by one of the apothecaries who had supplied the poison.

Investigations were set in motion, and those involved in the affair, including the Earl of Rochester and the Countess of Essex themselves, were eventually brought to trial, in May 1616, and convicted of Sir Thomas' murder. They too found now themselves in the Tower, but unlike Sir Thomas, they were spared death by a royal pardon. The King was looking after his favourites. Some even said he himself had had a hand in the affair.

The murder of Sir Thomas Overbury was an enormous scandal at the time, and Sir Thomas's father, Sir Nicholas, described how crowds would follow him in the street shouting "There goes Sir Thomas Overbury's father". Some wag worked out that Sir Thomas Overbury was an anagram of "O, O, a busie murther!"

*I say take away Tyranny and restore
Christians to their just and full Liberty of
captivating their understandings to
Scripture only, and, as Rivers, when they
have a free passage, run all to the Ocean,
so it may well be hoped, by God's
blessing, that Universal Liberty, thus
moderated, may quickly reduce
Christendom to Truth and Unity."*

**Sir Thomas Overbury in "Ratiocinium
vernaculum"**

In his fictionalised account of the Campden Wonder "The Silver Bowl", Hugh Ross Williamson links the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury in the Tower and the Campden Wonder events 50 years later. In reality however, there is nothing to suggest that these two equally fascinating incidents are in any way linked and the Overbury family appears just to have been remarkably unfortunate to be caught up in these two cases within the space of two generations.

Not a great deal is known about the life of the author of the Account. The famous Oxford antiquary and historian Anthony Wood said of Overbury that he "was not educated in any university, only was a great traveller in parts beyond the seas, and afterwards a favourer of Protestant dissenters".

We know nothing of his travels, but we do know of his championing of religious freedom. In 1677 he wrote "Queries proposed to the serious Consideration of those who impose upon others in Things of Divine and Supernatural Revelation, and persecute any upon the account of Religion." When this was countered by a tract written by George Vernon, rector of Bourton on the Water, Overbury responded in 1678 with "Ratiocinium Vernaculum", which translates roughly as "Common Sense". We can get an impression of Overbury the man from the closing words of this work shown here.

Slightly pompous and verbose though he may have been, Overbury was nonetheless clearly a passionate believer in individual religious freedom in an age that was all too dominated by religious bigotry and was only just then emerging from fifteen years of civil strife sparked in large measure by differences over questions of faith.

It is certain that Sir Thomas was active as a magistrate in the Campden area at the time of William Harrison's disappearance. A document at Gloucester Record Office (D1340 A1/A1) records various wrongs suffered by the Quaker communities of Gloucestershire and includes an account of the breaking up by drunken soldiers of a Quaker meeting at neighbouring Broad Campden in 1660. The soldiers escort the Quakers off to take the Oath of Allegiance before a magistrate, none other than Sir Thomas Overbury, but they refuse to take the oath and Overbury is reluctantly obliged to commit them to gaol in Gloucester.

However, in August 1660, Overbury may well have been quite new to the job. He was knighted only on 25th June 1660, and it seems likely that he became a magistrate around the same time, as the new regime appointed its own men to positions of authority.

I fear that Overbury would have been disappointed to know that the publication of his account of the story did nothing to stem the tide of speculation and rumour. Considerable further embellishment of the story has occurred since 1676.

Marginal Notes by Sir Anthony Wood

John perry hung in chaines on the same gallows

Richard & Joan perry were after execution taken downe & buried unt the gallows :- Three dayes after a Gentlewoman pretending to understand witches hired a man to dig up the grave up the night search Joans body - shee being on horse back, drew up to the grave wh^{ch} was opened, but the horse start- ing at the sight of the body in grave, ran away unt the gallows & her head hitting against Johns feet struck her off from the horse into the grave -

After Harrison's returne John was taken downe & buried - And Harrison's wife soon after (being a snotty covetous presby- terian) hung her self in her owne house - why the read is to judge.

Upon Harrison's returne to London, Sir R. Hyde was at Gloucester in his circuit, & one of his men had seen Harrison there brought the news to Glouc. with saying he was the messenger of Hyde he be- came soon wth passionat^e, & commanding his servant to call the messenger, chid him for bringing false news & commanded the jailer to commit him to prison

John Perry hung in chaines on the same gallows.

Richard & Joan Perry were after execution taken downe & buried under the gallows :- Three dayes after a gentlewoman pretending to understand witches hired a man to dig up the grave that shee might search Joan's Body - shee being on horseback, drew up to the grave which was opened, but the horse, start- ing at the sight of the body in grave, ran away under the gallows & her head hitting against Johns feet struck her off from the horse into the grave -

After Harrison's returne John was taken downe & buried - And Harrison's wife soon after (being a snotty covetuous presby- terian) hung her self in her owne house - why, the reader is to judge.

Upon Harrison's returne to London, Sir R. Hyde was at Gloucester in his circuit, & one that had seen Harrison there brought the news to Glouc., which coming to the Hearinge of Hyde he be- came somewhat passionate, & commanding his servant to call the messenger, chid him for bringing false news & commanded the jailer to commit him to prison.

Sir Anthony Wood was an Oxford antiquary and collector who lived from 1632 until 1695. In an edition of [Overbury's account](#) now held at the Bodleian Library in Oxford and which belonged to Wood, someone (presumably Wood himself) wrote the following notes on some blank pages at the end:

Letter to Richard Gough

Mr. Harrison's wife fell into
a deep melancholy & at last
hanged herself after the return
of her husband; after her dth.
there was found a letter in her
scrutore, which she had rec^d.
from her husband, dated before
the execution of Joan & her
two sons.

There was a report, that Joan
Perry had bewitched a woman,
that lay bed-ridden several
years, who upon her executⁿ.
got up & recovered her former
state of health.

Mr. Harrison's wife fell into
a deep melancholy & at last
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the execution of Joan & her two
sons.

There was a report, that Joan
Perry had bewitched a woman,
that lay bed-ridden several
years, who upon her executⁿ.
got up and recovered her former
state of health.

The story about Harrison's wife having committed suicide is repeated in another set of manuscript notes in the copy in the collection once owned by the antiquary Richard Gough (1735-1809), also at the Bodleian.

These legends and rumours have often been accepted unquestioningly as fact by commentators. For example, [Sir Anthony Wood](#)'s phrase about Harrison's wife being a "snotty, covetuous presbyterian" has coloured several writers' characterisation of her. But one wonders if they are not the normal kind of fanciful embroidering that almost always occurs to stories such as this one, where facts are few and far between.

On the other hand, some people have speculated that the whole story could be a complete fabrication, a tall tale made up by Overbury, perhaps.

*Delibac. gaoli dnis Regis tent apud Glouc in com pred die mercury tertio die marty
anno regnis dnis nris Carolis scdis nunc Regis Angli &c xiii coram Robti Hyde milit pred
Justic de Banc. Necnon Justic ad Gaoli &c*

Willus Duky Barronett vic

King's Gaol Delivery held at Gloucester in the county of the same name Wednesday
the third of March
in the 13th year of the reign of our Lord Charles the second now King of England etc.
before Sir Robert Hyde
Justice of the Bench and Justice of the Gaol

William Duky Baronet

po se cul sus
iud. Johes Perrey & Ricus p interfeccionem Willi Harrison gen apud Chipping Campden
po se cul sus
iud Ricus Perrey & ead
po se cul sus
iud Johanna Perrey & ead

po se cul sus
iud Johes Perrey pro murthero per interfeccionem Willi Harrison gen apud Chipping Campden
po se cul sus
iud Ricus Perrey pro ead
po se cul sus
iud Johanna Perrey pro ead

	Pleaded not guilty	Found guilty	To be Hanged
Tried John Perry for the murder of William Harrison gent at Chipping Campden			
	Pleaded not guilty	Found guilty	To be Hanged
Tried Richard Perry for the same			
	Pleaded not guilty	Found guilty	To be Hanged
Tried Joan Perry for the same			

Go. v. 7
William Garrison

William
Garrison

William Garrison

~~William Garrison~~

will. Garrison

will Garrison