

BADDESLEY CLINTON, WARWICKSHIRE—I

THE PROPERTY OF MR T. W. FERRERS-WALKER

By JOHN CORNFORTH

The recent decision of the Government not to purchase Baddesley Clinton out of the National Land Fund jeopardises the future of this ancient and vulnerable place. This article concentrates on its history, and a second will consider the nature of the problem and the case for the use of the Land Fund.



1—THE ENTRANCE FRONT AND STABLES OF BADDESLEY CLINTON, NEAR KNOWLE, WARWICKSHIRE. "Baddesley is that rare thing, a house of medieval origin that passed by descent for 500 years through a line of poor gentry"

WHEN Sir William Dugdale completed his *Antiquities of Warwickshire* in 1656, he made one dedication, "To my Honoured Friends, the Gentry of Warwickshire", and continued: "That all things perish by Age and Time or some unhappy Accidents, is a thing not to be denied; the consideration whereof hath not a little incited me to the undertaking of this present work. . . ." He had been gathering his material in troubled times, with families divided, imprisoned, exiled and fined, houses raided and sacked, monuments defaced and records lost; and among the places he had cause to remember in that context was Baddesley Clinton, for close on 70 years the property of the first Warwickshire antiquary, Henry Ferrers (1549–1633). Squire and lawyer as well as researcher, Henry Ferrers is still in some ways the dominant figure at Baddesley with his love of heraldry expressed in carved wood and painted glass in almost every room, but the emphasis on quarterings and coronets is deceptive. Descended from a Norman earl he may have been, but he was never rich and nor have been any of his successors.

Thus Baddesley is that rare thing, a house of medieval origin that passed by descent for 500 years through a line of poor gentry. In 1739 the estate was worth less than £600 a year, and in 1923 what was probably a very similar property of 1,411 acres was worth £1,673 gross. There was seldom any outside income but generally interest had to be paid on a growing pile of mortgages.

No generation seems to have produced a skilled businessman, but the family would have attributed their lack of offices or rich marriages to their Catholicism. While avoiding martyrdom and expensive penalties of recusancy

they were not even always able to live at Baddesley, but both Henry the Antiquary and his son Edward managed to alter the house, and two, or possibly three generations followed them in the first half of the 18th century. However, they were forced to make economy the partner of a respect for tradition, and it is striking how deep a love for the place has emerged not only in them but in no fewer than

nine of its owners throughout the centuries.

The place might have been lost in the time of the father of Henry the Antiquary, in Henry's time or that of his son, Edward, who suffered from the depredations of the Parliamentarians. Edward's son, Henry, had to let the park and he and his son, George, seem to have gone to live at Sutton Coldfield. Somehow the family managed to stumble through the 18th century, but as a widow in the 1830s, Lady Harriet Ferrers, was nearly imprisoned for debt, and her son, Marmion Edward, was only saved in the 1860s by his wife's aunt, Georgiana Lady Chatterton, and her second husband, Edward Heneage Dering, coming to live at Baddesley.

In the early 20th century the situation got worse and worse, and the place was only saved in 1940 by the late Mr Thomas Ferrers. Now his son, T. W. Ferrers-Walker, is seeking a permanent solution to the problems of the place.

It is an unusually moving history even for a Catholic house and, in stressing the historical difficulties, the aim is not to play a confidence trick on modern sympathy. Rather is it a reminder that the problems of historic houses are not new, and that because public awareness of them is usually confined to great houses and the collections of noble families, it is important to stress the duty to preserve a balance of places for posterity.

Certainly there is a fairly widespread sympathy for the smaller historic houses, and people often enjoy their visits to them more because it is easier to identify with them, but the solution to their problems has attracted less serious attention. Also it tends to be forgotten that the greater and smaller houses represent two classes of people shading off into each other, aristocracy and gentry, and, while



2—THE GATEHOUSE. The arch and door within it are 15th-century, and the window over it late-Elizabethan or Jacobean

this aspect of Baddesley's history is being pieced together.

However, so far the role of Henry Ferrers has not been discussed. It is hard to believe that he knew nothing of the work involved in preparing the hides in the west range and in the roof of the gatehouse range and did not suspect the reason for the Vaux sisters' desire to have the house. After all they belonged to a particularly marked Catholic circle that included their father, Lord Vaux, and Sir Thomas Tresham (a convert of 1577), both of whom were taken into custody in 1588. The dates suggest to me that the hides could have been made either during the alterations begun before the death of Henry Ferrer's wife or that Henry Ferrers left his work unfinished and so provided good cover for the Vaux sisters who were able to construct the hides as part of the completion they agreed to carry out.

Henry Ferrers was certainly a devout Catholic, but, unlike one of his sisters-in-law, he was never indicted as a recusant. Even if none of his papers had survived, they would be unlikely to provide direct clues as to his real position, and the whole episode has all the making of a good historical-romance-cum-detective-story.

The apparent connection between 16th-century Catholicism and early historical studies has been commented on, and Henry Ferrers is a typical link figure, albeit a little misty because he never published anything and so few of his papers survive in the British Museum and the Bodleian Library. Mary McKisack in *Medieval History in the Tudor Age* accepts him as a member of the Elizabethan Society of Antiquaries and certainly there is no doubt of his standing in his lifetime and after his death, as can be seen from the tributes of Camden, Erdswick and Dugdale.

Camden wrote of him: "a man both for parentage and for knowledge of antiquity very commendable; and my especial friend: who both in this place and also elsewhere hath at all

5—THE NORTH SIDE OF THE HOUSE FROM ACROSS THE OUTER MOAT

times conveniently shewed me the right way, when I was out, and from his candle, as it were, hath lighted mine."

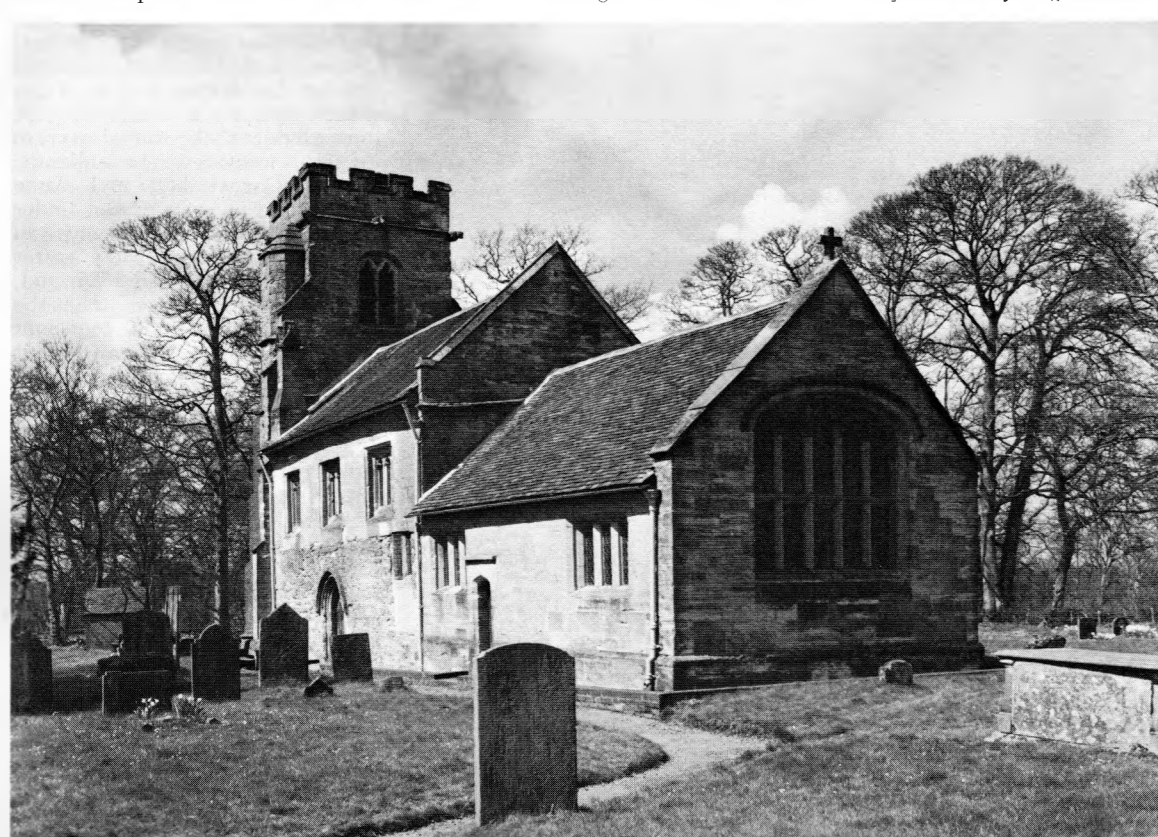
At Baddesley his taste for heraldry can be followed on from the mid 1580s to the late 1620s when he was still fussing over the details of an overmantel (Fig 9), but to some extent his son must have shared his interest in family genealogy, because some of the overmantels are evidently his, one being dated 1634. The finest, however, the one of carved stone in the Hall, must be Henry's, for it makes no reference to Edward Ferrer's marriage to Anne Peyto that took place in 1611 and it also omits any reference to the Antiquary's mother's family, the Windsors. What the arrangements were between Henry and Edward is not clear: although both were widowers, they did always

share the house and Henry died not at Baddesley but at another house that they owned nearby, Kingswood.

He was buried at Baddesley, and there in 1634 Edward Ferrers rebuilt the chancel "at his own proper costes and charges", as he had inscribed on a tablet, in a style that at first seems just old fashioned Gothic but is surely a statement about the historical continuity of the English Church. The wooden screen (Fig 8) is inscribed with quotations from the Bible as well as from Virgil, and the east window is set with a combination of 16th- and 17th-century glass. Carefully restored in 1872, it is still fairly close to the description in Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (there was no plate either because Henry Ferrers, the grandson of the Antiquary, refused to pay his share because Dugdale would not return his grandfather's papers or he could not afford to). The 16th-century donor panels are of Sir Edward and Constance Ferrers and their children, and her father Nicholas Brome, and the heraldry (not all described by Dugdale) takes the story down to Henry the Antiquary and Edward Ferrers. There are also figures of St George and St Catherine, with, in the centre, the Crucifixion, presumably new glass acquired by Edward Ferrers.

There has been a tendency to devalue the window as a restoration, but in fact it seems to be a rare and fascinating statement about Caroline Anglicanism.

Henry Ferrers recorded that his son worshipped in the church and certainly he was never fined for recusancy, but all the same one is left with a feeling that the rebuilding may have been a cover-up for Catholicism in the household. Later in the 17th century the Ferrers seem to have been served by Franciscans, and in the early 18th century there are payments of double taxation and records of chaplains; Catholic girls were chosen as brides and Catholic husbands were sought for daughters; and, as the Rev Henry Norris records in his book *Baddesley* (1897), the



6—THE CHURCH NEAR THE HOUSE. The porch was built by Nicholas Brome in the reign of Henry VII, and the chancel was rebuilt by Edward Ferrers in 1634

the problems of the gentry in the 17th century have received considerable attention, it is not realised that many remained poor, being virtually indistinguishable from farmers, except for their right to bear arms.

The entrance front at Baddesley (Fig 1) looks back to the more optimistic days of the early Ferrers, who served as High Sheriffs and Members of Parliament, and their predecessors the Bromes, but the south front in brick (Fig 4), if removed from its moat, could be taken for a substantial Warwickshire Georgian farm house. It is not easy to grasp this aspect of Baddesley, and consequently it may not be easy to appreciate the very cogent reason for preserving house, church and park as an enclave that is as fragile and vulnerable as it is rare.

The present situation and Mr Ferrers-Walker's approach to the Government will be discussed in a second article, but because the house is little known and has not been described at any length since Arthur Oswald wrote about it in *COUNTRY LIFE* in 1932, it seemed only right to set the issues in context with up-to-date photographs, and to include the church, which was not illustrated in 1932.

As far as the main outline of the history of the house is concerned there is little new to add to Arthur Oswald's account, which began in the 10th century and continued through the later ownership of the de Clintons, who contributed their name, the Burdets and the Catesbys. However, the ownership is so complicated that it is difficult to suggest who began the house and how much of its fabric dates back to the time of the earliest mention of the moat in 1434. Recent work on antiquarian studies and on recusancy as well as Elizabeth Berry's essay on Henry Ferrers *Dugdale Society Occasional Papers*, No. 16,

1965) enable us to fill out the picture of Elizabethan and early Stuart Baddesley, even if it provokes some tantalising questions.

The Ferrers acquired Baddesley in 1517 through the marriage of Sir Edward Ferrers to Constance, daughter of Nicholas Brome, who had built the tower of the church during the reign of Henry VII and may well have rebuilt much of the house as well. When Sir Edward died in 1535, he was succeeded by his grandson, another Edward, evidently an unsatisfactory figure.

Henry the Antiquary, who was Edward's son, was only 14 when his father died. The

first date in his career is 1572, when he was admitted as a member of the Middle Temple, and from the mid 1570s he seems to have divided his time between Warwickshire and London, doing some legal work to supplement his rents, attempting to bring order to his tangled affairs, and pursuing his antiquarian studies. He married in 1582 and had three children before his wife died in 1586.

Dates surviving on heraldic glass suggest that he may have made some improvements to the house in the mid '80s (the last is dated 1588), but it seems that the death of his wife and shortage of money drove him to London in 1589-90 and in the latter year he was imprisoned for debt.

There may be more to these events than has been realised, because during his time in London he let Baddesley to the Vaux sisters and for a short time the house evidently became the centre of Jesuit activity in the Midlands. Father Garnet had met Anne Vaux and her widowed elder sister Eleanor Brooksby in Leicestershire fairly soon after landing in England in 1586, and, after William Weston, then the Superior, was caught, he took over the affairs of the Mission. Was it he who suggested to the sisters that they should take another house in addition to Great Ashby, where Eleanor Brooksby was apparently living? And was Baddesley the unnamed house in the long description of the priest hunt in 1591 that is published in Godfrey Anstruther's *Vaux of Harrowden*?

It seems very likely that it was, because of the references to the hide in the water corresponding to the one that lies in the footings of the west range of Baddesley (Fig 3). Recently Michael Hodgetts has written about the priest holes at Baddesley (*Recusant History*, January, 1974) and of the identities of the Jesuits hidden there in 1591 (*Worcestershire Recusant*, December, 1974) and gradually



3—THE WEST RANGE. The slits just above water level light the late-16th-century hide



4—THE EARLY-18th-CENTURY SOUTH RANGE. "If removed from its moat, it could be taken for a substantial Warwickshire Georgian farmhouse"

three daughters of Thomas Ferrers (died 1760) became nuns.

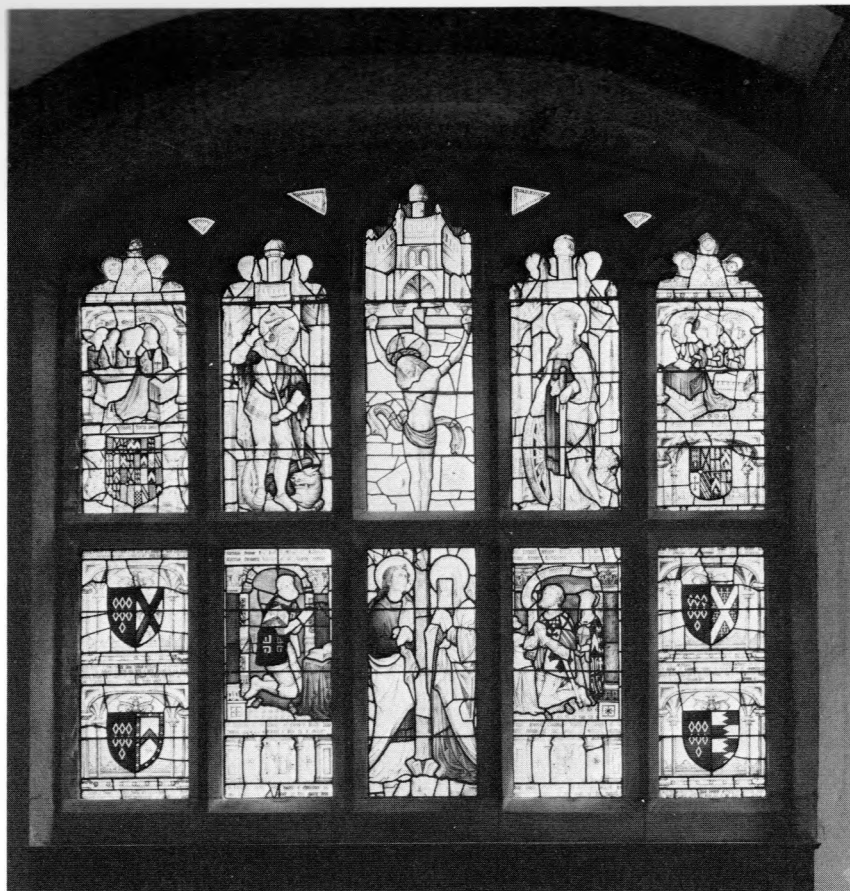
Mass only ceased to be celebrated in the house in the early 19th century, and then the Old Faith was revived in intensive form by Lady Chatterton, a convert, who re-opened the chapel in 1875, shortly before her death.

Edward Ferrers was an elderly man by the 1640s, but all the same he suffered heavy losses, which he calculated at £468 in 1643–44, and it seems that the house may even have been abandoned in the second half of the 17th century. Who began the restoration is not certain. In an account book now among the Ferrers papers at the Shakespeare Birthplace at Stratford-on-Avon yet another Edward Ferrers noted what he did between 1712 and 1723, and his son, Thomas, recorded his changes in the 1740s and 50s, but it is not clear to me that it was Edward who reconstructed the south range in brick. Certainly he did the stables and the outbuildings, but the reference to the court in 1715 and 1716 seems to suggest the outer court rather than the major work within the moat.

He had succeeded his father at the age of 34 in 1712 and married the same year and he seems the most likely figure. When he died in 1729, his son Thomas was only 16 and he did not marry for another eight years, which helps to explain the gap. Unfortunately there are no dates on the house to provide clues, so it is not clear whether two or three generations were responsible.

However long the restoration took, it was done with remarkable respect for the earlier work. It takes time, for instance, to realise that the gatehouse range was lengthened by two bays at the south end, because care was taken to match up the stone and disguise the transition to brick round the corner and, indeed, to take in the nature of the synthesis on the east front: the gatehouse arch and the door within it are both 15th century (Fig 2), but the window over it that lights the Great Dining Room is part of Henry Ferrers's work and its battlements are presumably 18th-century. The bay to the left and the two to the right appear to belong to the Brome period.

The position of the original hall range is also puzzling, and it is quite conceivable that the present Hall is not on the site of the Great Hall. Its main feature, Henry Ferrers's chimney-piece, was set up in the early 18th century, most probably, by Edward Ferrers, and it was presumably he who arranged the glass in the two large windows onto the court. It makes a brave and balanced show, with one series commemorating the Ferrers, Earls of Derby, and the other



7—THE EAST WINDOW. A combination of 16th-century glass commemorating the Bromes and early-17th-century glass that is a statement of Caroline Anglicanism

Their presence calls for some explanation, because the links are so much a part of the history of the house and the family. William, the 7th Earl, had two sons, Robert, the 8th and last Earl, who died in 1279 and from

whom descended the Lords de Ferrers, and William of Groby, who died the same year and was the father of the 1st Lord Ferrers of Groby.

The barony of de Ferrers passed via the Devereux family to the Shirleys, who eventually became Earls Ferrers. From the younger son of the 5th Lord Ferrers of Groby descended the Ferrers of Tamworth Castle and the Ferrers of Baddesley Clinton. And to complicate matters the de Ferrers barony eventually passed to the Marquess Townshend, and, when the 3rd Marquess died in 1855, Marmion Edward Ferrers was the rightful claimant through his mother, Lord Townshend's sister. Ironically he could not afford to lodge his claim.

Twelve years later he married Rebecca Dulcibella Orpen, and soon after that her aunt Georgiana, Lady Chatterton and Mr Dering came to join them at Baddesley. For a few years life in the old house achieved an intensity it had not experienced since the tenancy of the Vaux sisters, and even now it is hard not to see Baddesley through the literary imagination and religious enthusiasm of Lady Chatterton and the romantic paintings of Rebecca Dulcibella Ferrers. Perhaps one should not try,

but enjoy it as an unlikely chapter of Victorian country house history and see in it yet another reason for not tossing the house to the winds.

*Illustrations: Alex Starkey.
(To be concluded)*



8—THE NAVE WITH EDWARD FERRERS'S WOODEN SCREEN. (Right) 9—A CARVED

