

SHURLAND HOUSE.

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THE Isle of Sheppey would seem to have comprised two Manors, that of Shurland representing the paramount Lordship, while that of Northwode occupied a mesne position, the former combining the entire island, for the earliest recorded holder of it was styled "Jordanus de Scapeia," as being Lord of Sheppey. A descendant of his, Sir Stephen, assumed the name of Northwode, having apparently taken up his abode in that manor-house; and to his descendant, Sir John de Northwode, and his wife Joan the still remaining brasses in the Church of Minster are ascribed, though they were long believed to have been to the memory of his father, Sir Roger de Northwode, who had been a very liberal benefactor to the Abbey and the Church.

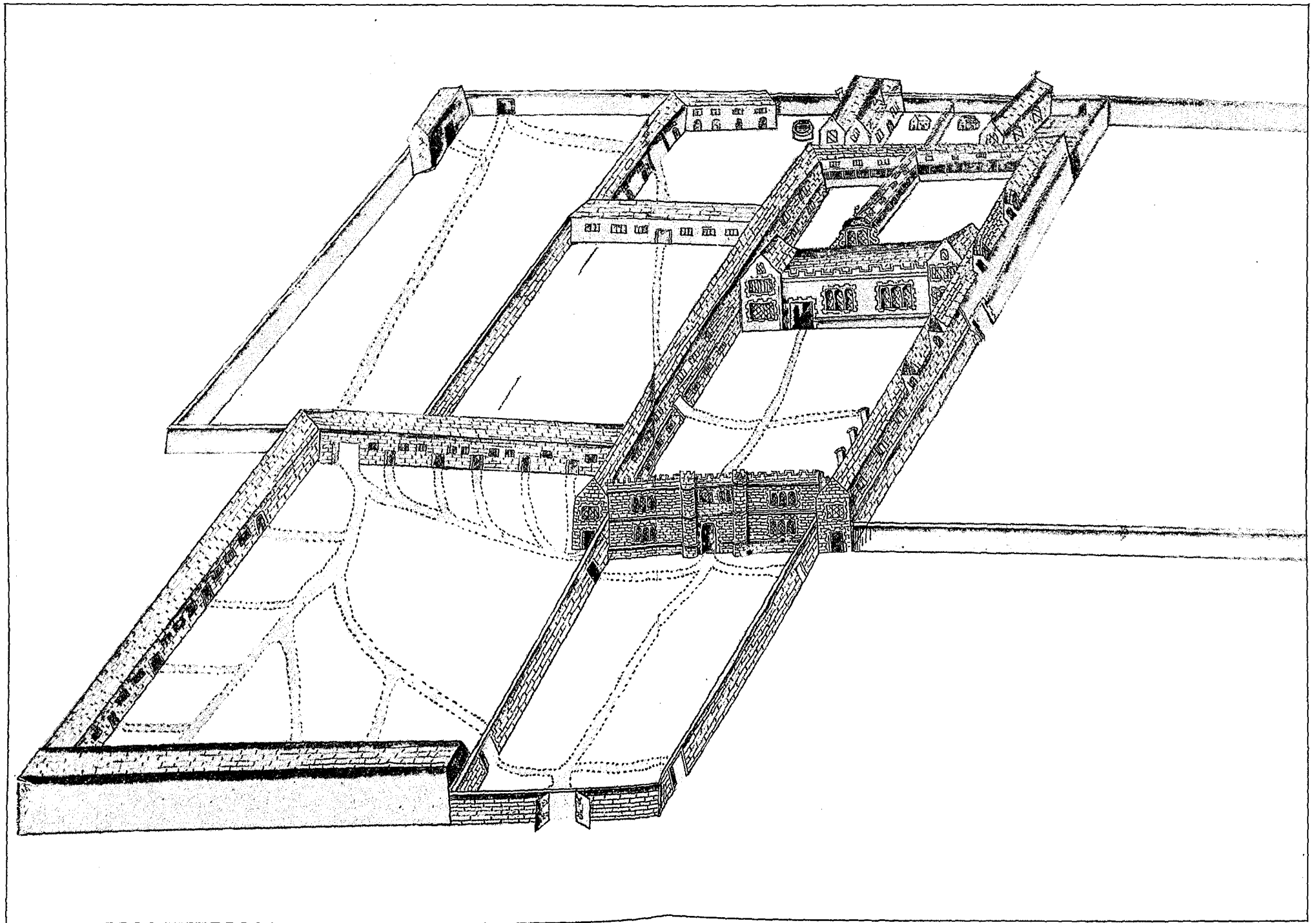
But the glory of the Northwode branch seems to have been always subordinated to, and was soon to be eclipsed by, the greater eminence of the House of Shurland, in whom our interest at present centres.* The first member of this branch which rose to any distinction was Sir Jeffery de Shurland, who was in high favour with Henry I.; but it was his son, Sir Robert de Shurland, who gave the great notoriety to the name, whose monument, with the strange accompaniment of the horse's head, has been fully described in the account of the Abbey Church.†

Now if we could attach any reliance to the record given by a very popular chronicler—or rather graphic, if somewhat imaginative, expositor of our old chronicles—Tom Ingoldsby,‡ this Sir Robert de Shurland was a most redoubtable Knight,

* This Paper was read in the hall of Shurland House on the occasion of the Archæological Congress in 1896.

† Vol. XXII., p. 157.

‡ The Legend of the "Grey Dolphin."



BIRDS - EYE VIEW OF SHURLAND CASTLE.
TEMPO ELIZABETH.

and to-day, standing on the site of his Baronial Hall, you might be tempted to ask me "Where is the doorstep at which his memorable boots were wont to stand? Where the hook on which his mighty sword yclept 'Tickle Toby' hung?"

But, alas! I regret that I cannot satisfy your very natural and reasonable request, for the simple reason that the house of Sir Robert de Shurland survives only in name. Not a vestige of the thirteenth century building remains; all has long since disappeared to make room for a house still bearing the old name, and almost more historic as the residence of the Cheney family.*

Sir Robert de Shurland had no son to perpetuate his name, or perhaps outdo his fame. An only daughter Margaret, marrying a young Kentish knight, Sir William Cheney of Patricksbourne, carried the estates thither, and it is of the Cheneyes as Lords of Shurland that we have now to speak.

Sir Alexander, the father of Sir William Cheney, had been brother-in-arms with Sir Robert de Shurland, and both had been dubbed Knights-Banneret by Edward I. for gallantry at Carlaverock. The Cheney family had no mean record to shew during the fourteenth and fifteenth and early part of the sixteenth centuries, embracing the period between the reigns of Edward III. and Henry VIII. No less than ten times had members of the family represented the County of Kent alone in Parliament, while Shurland House had been the scene of at least eight Shrievalty banquets given by a Cheney. Of these it may be well to give a few details.

Sir Robert Cheney, the son of Margaret de Shurland, was three times elected Knight of the Shire for Kent—in the years 1348, 1351, and 1357. His grandson Sir William represented the county in 1416, and the following year was appointed by Henry V. Justice, and ten years after by Henry VI. Chief Justice of the King's Bench.† His son,

* Under its varying forms of Chene, Cheney, Cheyney, and Chayney.

† Philipot's *Villare Cantianum*, p. 382; Foss's *Judges of England*.

also Sir John, sat for the county in 1449, while his grandson, again a Sir John, has a still more prominent place in the history of his country. He not only sat for the county, but was also Speaker of the House of Commons. A staunch Lancastrian, he was made a Knight-Banneret by Henry VII. for his gallant conduct at the battle of Bosworth Field, and two years after had the further honour of being made a Knight of the Garter and created Baron Cheney of Shurland. Leaving no son, the title became for a time extinct, and the estates passed on his death in 1496 to his nephew Thomas, the son of his younger brother William. Under him the star of the House of Cheney rose to its zenith, and culminated in a visit of Royalty to Shurland House. It was this Sir Thomas Cheney whose costly monument, so rich with emblazonry of alliances direct and indirect, forms so conspicuous an ornament in Minster Church. Along its verge may still be traced more or less completely the record of the several posts of honour to which his plasticity of character raised him. Beginning his public life as a favourite of the then all-powerful Wolsey, he was in 1520 admitted as one of the six Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber, then a Privy Councillor; in 1539 Treasurer of the Royal Household and a Knight of the Garter; Warden also of the Cinque Ports, Constable of Queenborough Castle, and Lord Lieutenant for Kent.* It seemed not to matter who was on the Throne, whether Henry or Edward, Mary or Elizabeth, he adapted himself to each, and retained his offices in the Council and the Household under all. He was the while adding manor to manor, chiefly as gifts from his Royal patron, such as the suppressed Priors of Faversham, Davington, and Fordwich, the historic Castle and lands of Chilham, besides many other Kentish manors, holding withal the ancestral estate of Patricksbourne Cheney. In addition to these he owned the wealthy manor of Toddington in Beds, which came to him through his wife, the daughter of Sir William Broughton. These all helped to swell the Shurland rent-roll, and enabled him to entertain

* *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XXII., p. 161.

with fitting magnificence Henry VIII. and the fair but frail Anne Boleyn in 1532.

Before this Royal visit, and possibly in anticipation of the honour, Shurland House was expanded out of materials of which he had despoiled the noble old Castle of Chilham, until it became no unworthy place in its enlarged proportions for the reception of, and as a resting place for, the greatest of the Tudor monarchs in one of his progresses. Then apparently, as the accompanying plan suggests, a wing on either side spread out from the central gateway which, with its flanking towers and their newel stairs, claims a somewhat earlier date. Then came the banqueting hall on the east of the main court, the dormitories on either side, one court after another, till the whole range spread over several acres, comprising no less than nine quadrangles, enclosed within high stone walls with the chapel in the far south-east corner, the whole forming a worthy mansion for a man who was styled "Strenuus Miles."

This visit of Henry was probably prompted by the whim and the vanity of that beautiful siren Anne Boleyn, then in the heyday of her beauty and power, in her desire to see the whilom abode of an ancestress of her own, for an aunt of hers had married a Cheney. It was a whim which her then infatuated adorer could not but gratify, and a loyal subject, the recipient of so many favours, could not but accept at whatever cost.

A Royal progress, however, in those days involved an expenditure which could hardly fail to draw deeply on the resources of even a wealthy noble; and Sir Thomas, if all the more proud, was all the poorer for the distinguished presence of Royalty even for two days. It was doubtless a gorgeous spectacle which the Lord of Shurland Castle provided for the King in that truly baronial abode; but it was a short-lived glory that then floated over Shurland House. Forty years after this lordly mansion had sunk into a neglected dilapidated rarely-tenanted country house. Like so many others, it is a sad tale to tell.

Sir Thomas lived just to see Elizabeth ascend the Throne, and on his death in 1559 was succeeded by his son Sir Henry

Cheney, who had married the sole daughter and heiress of the wealthy Lord Wentworth.* Sir Thomas had married the rich heiress of Toddington in Bedfordshire, where he had a princely estate, but Shurland had still retained charms for him. Not so with Sir Henry; not all that Kent could offer him was to be compared in his mind with Toddington domain, so he resolved to make that his home, and to make it eclipse Shurland House. Here he erected what he describes as "a noble mansion;" and not to be left behind by his father's visit of Royalty, succeeded in attracting Elizabeth on two occasions (in 1563 and 1573) to honour him by including Toddington in one and another of her Progresses.† In reward for his lavish hospitality the Queen revived in his person the title which had lapsed on the death of his great-uncle Sir John, and attached to it the name of his estate, raising him to the Peerage as "Lord Cheney of Toddington." But in his case it was a still more fatal honour; it involved a still more costly sacrifice; it added fuel to the fire of reckless display, in which he indulged to such an extent as to become known as "The Extravagant Lord Cheney." The result was easy to foresee—he lived a spendthrift and died little better than a beggar. That pile which his father had accumulated and left to him was fast crumbling away; the estates which had made him one of the wealthiest of Kentish gentry were rapidly dispersed; manor after manor disappeared from his rent-roll; even the beloved and vaunted Toddington shared the general decay, and so utter had that decay become that Lysons says of it, "nothing but the kitchen remains."

Meanwhile Shurland House felt the sad consequences of the change. Even to the ears of Elizabeth came up the bitter cry of a neglected tenantry. Where the grand old Knight Sir Thomas had kept in his house "ordinairilie eight score serving men besides retayners, gentlemen, and others that were ready for all tymes of service, or danger of invasion, numbering at the leaste to 400 persons,"‡ by the year 1570

* Collins's *Peerage in loco*.

† Nicholl's *Progresses of Elizabeth*, vol. i., p. 33.

‡ *State Papers, Domestic Series (Elizabeth)*, vol. lxxv., p. 43.

Shurland House was standing empty, farm houses had fallen into decay, the island itself was well-nigh depopulated,* the land lay uncultivated, and the defences of the coast were perilously exposed. Such was the state of things when the Manor of Sheppey and Shurland House, which had for so many generations gone together, were separated—when the old ancestral home, of which Shurlands and Chenecys had been so proud, by some process of exchange reverted to the Crown.

Elizabeth at once saw the exposed and undefended condition of the island, and realizing the danger, set herself to restore, if it were possible, its prosperity, and to strengthen its fortifications. She had heard that many towns in Flanders and France were maintaining a large population, as well as creating a very remunerative industry, by the manufacture of leather.† Now the Isle of Sheppey still retained its fame as a producer of sheep;‡ its pelts (or plucked wool), its sheepskins, and lambskins she determined to turn to account; they should become a source of revenue, and bring together by traffic with the Continent a seafaring population.§ Already a “Merchaunte Stranger,” one Andreas or Andrew de Loo (or Delow, as sometimes called), had obtained a licence for leather production in the neighbouring Isle of Grain. Why should not the licence be extended to Sheppey, and a monopoly of restricted sale be established here? This would soon bring together a class not only of manufacturers and traders, but a body of men who might be utilized for

* “Thomas Fluds thinks decreased population caused by heavy rating (2000 acres unoccupied).”—*State Papers, Domestic Series (Elizabeth)*, vol. lxxv., art. 40.

† *State Papers, Domestic Series (Elizabeth)*, vol. lxxv., p. 36, art. 1.

‡ Old Lambarde, in his own quaint style, bears testimony to the value of the sheep of this island in his day (1579). “Whether the shiepe of this Realme were in price before the coming of the Saxons or no, they be now (God be thanked therefore) worthy of great estimation, both for the exceeding finenesse of the fleese, which passeth all other in Europe at this day, and is to be compared with the ancient delicate wooll of Tarentum, or the Golden Fleese of Cochis itself, and for the abundant store of flocks.”—*Perambulations*, p. 250.

§ *State Papers, Domestic Series (Elizabeth)*, vol. lxxv., art. 38. In addition to its repute as a pasture-ground for sheep, we can trace back its present fame for producing honey to an early period, for one William Sygor in the year 1466 in his will leaves *bee-hives* and *bees* for the support of a light of the Virgin Mary—“*apiarium cum apibus.*”

the Navy and the Forts,* increasing the revenue by export dues, and convert the island from being as it then was, an element of weakness, into a source of strength—"To transport, subject to payment of custom, not more than 4000 sheep-felts, 2000 sheepskins, and 4000 lambskins."†

"What," perhaps some of you will be tempted to ask, "has this to do with Shurland House?" A great deal. In a lease‡ granted by Elizabeth in 1580 is a stipulation that the tenant farmer shall convert "ten of the outer chambers or romes of the said house into tenements, and newe-build on the premises five other tenements, and in them to place ten able men to serve with caliver, pike, bowe, and such other like wepon for the defence of the island . . . and in the residue of the said house some honest and sufficient person with his family to dwell," and it shall be lawful "for her Majesty, if she please, to take down and sell certayne of the outer houses there, being superfluous." Thus was Shurland House turned for a time into a barrack, and the last-quoted clause explains how in the course of time the old mansion fell into its present condition.

Shurland House remained with the Crown until the beginning of the reign of James I., when (in 1605) he conferred what is termed in the Grant "the Capital Mansion of Shurland to his beloved and faithful servant Philip Herbert, Knight," the younger son of the Earl of Pembroke, whom he created Lord Herbert of Shurland and Earl of Montgomery. His elder brother William dying without sons, he succeeded to the family Earldom of Pembroke in 1630, was made Lord Chamberlain to Charles I. in 1625 and Chancellor of the University of Oxford in 1641, and was the last to hold the office of Constable of Queenborough Castle. He married as his second wife the famous Ann, Countess of Dorset, of whom the following anecdote is worth telling. When Sir Joseph Williamson, the Secretary of State to Charles II., wrote to her, naming a candidate whom he wished her to nominate for her pocket-borough of Appleby in Westmore-

* *State Papers*, Domestic Series (Elizabeth), vol. lxxv., art. 4.

† *Ibid.*, art. 38.

‡ *Ibid.*, vol. ccxiv., pp. 18, 19.

land, the Countess replied, "I have been bullied by an usurper; I have been neglected by a Court; I will not be dictated to by a subject."

The history of Shurland House began with the traditional enterprise of the dauntless Baron Sir Robert. It may appropriately close with the anecdote of the equally dauntless Countess.