

MEMBERS MEETING -6 MARCH 2007

Mary Queen of Scots in captivity under the custodianship of George Talbot - A talk by David Templeman illustrated with slides.

Before he started his talk David explained that many people had written books about the colourful life of Mary Queen of Scots. However, little had been written about the fact that she spent one third of her life in captivity. David has done a great deal of research in the archives in Sheffield to find out about this period in her life.

Mary Queen of Scots, a Catholic, was widowed in France in 1560 when she was only eighteen. She returned to Scotland and married Lord Darnley but the marriage ended in disaster. He was murdered by the Earl of Bothwell and she was implicated in the plot. To make matters worse she married Bothwell three months after the murder.

The local lords thought Bothwell was trying to make himself ruler of Scotland so they raised an army against him. After only five weeks Bothwell ran away and Mary was imprisoned in the castle of Loch Leven for more than a year. The Earl of Moray was made regent of Scotland and Mary had to agree she was no longer Queen. Her infant son, James, was proclaimed king. Mary escaped from the castle in disguise but again the Earl of Moray rose up against her and Mary fled to England.

She asked her cousin, Queen Elizabeth, for help but Protestant Elizabeth saw Mary as a dangerous rival whose aim was to become Queen of England so she agreed that Mary could stay in England but under her control.

Initially she was held in various places; Workington, Cockerton, Carlisle Castle and Bolton whilst Elizabeth decided what should be done with her. The Duke of Norfolk, with whom Mary was associated, was involved in a plot against Queen Elizabeth. The famous "Casket Letters" implicated Mary in the plot but as there were no names and the dates had been forged she was found not guilty. However, there was a cloud of suspicion over Mary and this suited Elizabeth as it gave her an excuse for her detention. Elizabeth had to decide what to do with Mary long term. If she were kept in custody it had to be with the privileges of a queen i.e. with maids, ladies in waiting etc. so the question arose as to who would be appointed her custodian.

It was suggested to Elizabeth that George Talbot, the Earl of Shrewsbury, was the man for the job. He was a Protestant who was loyal to Elizabeth, a man she could trust when there were plots and counter-plots against her. Talbot was also financially suited to the task as he was one of the richest men in the north of England with incomes from coal, lead and rents. More importantly he had a string of houses in central England. Elizabeth only paid Talbot £52 per week to look after Mary so it is not surprising that after fourteen years

of her custodianship he was practically bankrupt. The reason why he was paid so little was that Elizabeth was miserly with the privy-purse. In 1575 Talbot did apply for an increase to the allowance but Elizabeth reduced it to £30 per week.

So it was that Mary's imprisonment began at Tutbury Castle on 4.2.1569. Tutbury was owned by the Duchy of Lancaster and used as a hunting lodge by the Earl of Shrewsbury. It was secure as it had steep sides and only one entrance so there was no way of escape. The castle had been a win for some 200 years and Mary was confined to two little rooms. Her health deteriorated during her captivity here. She suffered from porphyria (like George III) and the stress, cold and unsanitary conditions made it worse.

The Earl of Shrewsbury wrote to Queen Elizabeth suggesting that Mary should be moved to Wingfield Manor. Mary's imprisonment at Wingfield Manor from 20 April 1569 also had problems. There were many "hangers-on" from Scotland. The Earl of Shrewsbury was feeding and giving security to some 240 people there. There were no "amenities" and therefore disease soon spread. Mary became ill and Elizabeth and the Earl of Shrewsbury were concerned that suspicion of foul play would attach to them if she died.

So on 22 May 1569 she was moved to Chatsworth for 10 days whilst the apartments were "cleaned". On 2 June Mary was returned to Wingfield but on the way back they were caught in a rainstorm and the Earl of Shrewsbury caught a chill and became very ill. Whilst he was ill Leonard Dacre attempted to release Mary but the plan was thwarted because Mary did not go along with it as it would prejudice her affair with the Duke of Norfolk. Bess of Hardwick received a letter from Elizabeth saying the Earl should be ashamed for leaving Mary unattended. Bess rebuffed the accusation saying that the Earl was a prisoner too and that the custodianship was a financial burden.

The Earl of Shrewsbury recovered from his illness but was worried about the security and number of people at Wingfield. He suggested Mary would be more secure at Sheffield Castle which comprised of 4 acres and because it was moated was impregnable. Elizabeth approved of the suggestion but before it could take place she found out about the Duke of Norfolk. As every marriage had to be approved of by the Queen she "hit the roof" and in spite cancelled the move to Sheffield and instead on 21 September 1569 sent Mary back to Tutbury.

In November at Tadcaster there was an attempt by the northern earls to put Catholics (i.e. Mary and the Duke of Norfolk) on the throne but the plan was too ambitious and did not receive support from the Catholics. On 26 November 1569 Mary arrived at Coventry Castle which was totally isolated (hence the saying "sent to Coventry"). The Catholic revolt had petered out from lack of support and the soldiers at Tadcaster went back north. Although Elizabeth hated bloodshed she mobilised her army and laid waste to 500 towns and villages in the Scottish borders hanging 10-12 people in each place. Her message was clear "don't do it again".

In January 1570 Mary returned to Tutbury. The same problems of food, fuel and water returned and Mary was soon ill again. It was agreed in May 1570 that she be moved to Chatsworth. Here she was held in the building now known as Queen Mary's Bower. Mary was an outdoor person. She was a good horsewoman and used to hunting, hawking and playing golf and tennis. In the Earl's company she was allowed to ride and take the air. She stayed here for 6 months but in November 1570 a plot to take her to France was uncovered by Walsingham's spies.

The Earl of Shrewsbury was sick of the problem so it was decided to move Mary to Sheffield Castle. This was to be her main imprisonment for the next 14 years. Labourers in the fields at Holmesfield saw Mary's move, with some 200 horses, on Curbar Edge on their way to Sheffield.

Sadly there is nothing left of Sheffield Castle now. The moated castle, which had only one entrance, stood at the confluence of the rivers Sheaf and Don and covered more than 4 acres. The Castle Market in Sheffield stands on the site of the castle and there are plans to excavate the area when the market is re-located.

1571 was a pivotal year in Mary's captivity. The Duke of Norfolk was re-arrested on 5 September for his part in the Ridolfi plot. Mary was not arrested but the conditions of her custody became tighter and her medicines were withheld. She had a capacity to endure suffering and was tenacious under trying circumstances.

In 1572 the Earl of Shrewsbury was allowed to go to London to be a judge at the trial of the Duke of Norfolk. The Duke was beheaded but Mary was let off. She was held in solitary confinement but was allowed to walk in the deer park with the Earl of Shrewsbury.

Sheffield Castle was her main place of detention but from 1573 Sheffield Manor Lodge (featured in the 2004 BBC Restoration programme) became a useful alternative when the castle was being "cleaned". Other places visited by Mary during the 14 years were Chatsworth (7 times), Buxton (6 times) and Worksop Manor (twice).

In 1574 the Turret House was built at Sheffield Manor Lodge. It was built in red Tudor brick with gardens of 4 acres. Mary's room there had a Tudor ceiling, now over 430 years old and the coat of arms of the Talbots. By this time all Mary was allowed to do was read and work in her chamber. In 1575 Mary wrote to Lasgerie, an old physician from France, stating that she was worse off than the state prisoners in the Bastille as she was not allowed to go out on a horse or to the chase.

On 26 July 1580 Mary had an accident on her way to Buxton. She fell when mounting her horse and damaged her spine. This was to cause her pain for the rest of her life requiring her to be carried in a sedan chair.

In 1583 there was a plot by France and Spain (the Throgmorton plot) to invade England and put Mary on the throne. The plan was given away by John Somerville and he was arrested with four others. His house was searched and papers were found naming those involved. The culprits were hung, drawn and quartered.

Mary was held at Worksop in 1583. Sadly this house burnt down in 1761. It was a spectacular house that would have dwarfed Chatsworth. It had 660 rooms, a long gallery and a deer- park. From here Mary said “I did not walk much, not being allowed the command of my legs”.

The Earl of Shrewsbury was granted leave to go to court in 1583 and Sir Ralph Sadler was chosen to take care of Mary. Mary left Sheffield Manor Lodge for Wingfield Manor on 1 September 1584 and the hand over was made on 24 September 1584.

The custodianship of Mary was a terrible task for the Earl of Shrewsbury as she was neither his guest nor his prisoner, but on remand for 15 years. She was a prisoner with privileges. Who was right Mary or Elizabeth? Mary was wrong in that she plotted against Elizabeth but Elizabeth too was wrong as she had no legal right to keep Mary so severely. However, these were 14 years of importance with intrigue, plot and counter-plot. The whole course of history could have been altered if Mary had escaped.

A vote of thanks on behalf of members was given by Roy Pidcock.