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was a small reed organ, not unlike a portable harmonium (though producing its sounds in a different fashion); but the term was also widely used for any kind of chamber organ, and it may also have stood for the organ stop later known as the *vox humana*. The 'virginals' was a harpsichord, most often of pentagonal or rectangular shape. The 'dulcemers' was much more uncommon; if Alcester really meant what we should now term a dulcimer—a stringed instrument struck by two little hammers, and the ancestor of the *cimbalom* found in gypsy bands—then this is one of the very few occurrences of that instrument in sixteenth-century English sources.

Lastly, on the blank page preceding St. Matthew's Gospel, Alcester has ruled four pairs of staves, each of seven, eight or nine lines. The first two pairs contain a piece called 'Non exspectat'; an inscription at the top of the page much mutilated by the binder's guillotine, appears to read 'For the Virginallus'. The second piece, more rough and ready, is headed 'The Trowmpettes' and it is an essay in a genre later made famous by William Byrd in his set of pieces called 'The Battle'.

Of this handful of compositions set down by a musical amateur during the middle years of the century, none is outstanding in quality, though all can fill gaps in our limited knowledge of how music in England grew and developed at this troubled time. Alcester's musical training, while not profound, must have been typical of that given to hundreds of his fellow religious. It is not too difficult to write a tolerable dance-tune with a simple series of supporting harmonies, as many Tin-Pan-Alley composers of our own time have shown, but the skills needed for the polyphonic motets of the sixteenth century needed a more thorough grounding than Alcester seems to have acquired during his time at Evesham. To date any of the pieces with any precision is extremely hard, but I should have supposed them to be typical of English music in the provinces during the earliest years of the reign of Elizabeth, rather than during the reigns of her brother or sister. I should like to think, too, that Alcester wrote them simply for his own enjoyment and instruction; four centuries later they have certainly given instructive enjoyment to another lover of English keyboard music.

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A Speculation in Monastic Lands

THAT the formal record of the sale of a particular parcel of monastic lands in the years after the dissolution may give a very inadequate picture of the actual negotiations involved in the transaction is made very clear by the well-documented instance of the Benedictine house of Selby in Yorkshire. The site and demesnes of this great abbey (which had surrendered to the Crown on 6 December 1539), together with certain of its lands in the immediate neighbourhood of the town

of Selby, were granted to Sir Ralph Sadler in August 1540.¹ Four months later, in December 1540, a licence was issued for the alienation of these properties from Sadler to Leonard Beckwith.² This latter transaction, whereby the augmentations' receiver for Yorkshire came to be the proprietor of one of the more profitable monastic properties within his own area, has all the outward appearance of a 'job'. Sadler, but recently promoted to one of the joint secretaryships, was sufficiently influential at court to be able without much difficulty to secure for himself the grant of almost any abbey he chose. Beckwith, charged with the administration of the revenues of the suppressed houses in Yorkshire, was in a position to know where good bargains could be found. The rapidity with which Selby passed from the one to the other would incline one to suspect some degree of collusion between the two parties.

And yet, when one probes behind the formal record, the story which emerges is no simple tale of profitable co-operation between secretary and receiver, but a lively narrative of the hopes and misfortunes of yet a third party through whose hands the property passed in the few months between Sadler's grant and Beckwith's purchase; one whose name does not appear in the formal record at any point; one whose original plans miscarried, but who yet reaped a substantial profit from the transaction. This middleman was Henry Whitreson (or Whitereason) of Hackney, a fellow townsman, an acquaintance, and perhaps even a business associate of Sadler. Of his part in the sale of Selby there are two accounts. One, the more circumstantial, and, rather surprisingly, the more revealing as far as Whitreson's intentions are concerned, is set forth in the course of his own testimony given before the court of Augmentations in May 1545 when the officers of that court were conducting an investigation into the 'dyverse injuriez wronges and concealmentes supposed to be done agaynste his highnes by Sir Leonard Bekwythe'³ his receiver in Yorkshire. The other, and much briefer version of the story, is to be found amongst the allegations of Oswald Sysson of Selby, one of the two informers whose bills of complaint had initiated the enquiry into Beckwith's official conduct.

It is fairly clear that the demand for this investigation was only the climax of a long feud between Beckwith and Sysson which dated back almost to the time of the surrender of Selby. Whitreson explains the origin of this dispute when he describes how Sysson successfully pressed Sadler to obtain a grant of Selby and to lease the site and demesnes to him (Sysson) for a twenty-one year term.⁴ The limits of the properties included in Sysson's lease were, however, ill defined, and, when Beckwith became his landlord, this uncertainty

¹ L[etters] & P[apers of Henry VIII], xv. 1027 (40): text in full in Yorkshire Archaeological Society's Record Series, xiii, 354.

² L & P. xvi, 379 (40).

³ P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice], E 315/113, fo. 77.

⁴ P.R.O., E315/113, fo. 30.

gave rise to friction between the two men. Sysson was also farmer to the king of the parsonage of Selby, and in that capacity fell into arrears, for the recovery of which Beckwith, in his capacity as receiver, took him to law.¹ In these circumstances it is only to be expected that the chief discrepancy between the two accounts of Whitreson's dealings with Beckwith and Sadler should be in the way they apportion the responsibility for initiating the deal. Whitreson, as we have just seen, alleged that it was Sysson who 'willid and procured the said Sir Rauff Sadler' to ask for the preferment of Selby and who promised at the same time that the secretary should have £100 and a horse as a fine for a 21 year lease of the site and demesnes.² Sysson, on the other hand, claimed that it was Whitreson, acting 'subtellye' for Beckwith, who persuaded Sadler to buy Selby, and that most of the money for this purchase was supplied by the receiver.³

The price Sadler paid for Selby was £736.⁴ Whitreson claimed that he promised Sadler £846 for an immediate resale. Both Beckwith and Whitreson agreed that the consideration for which Selby eventually passed between them in November 1540 was £1,040.⁵ These figures make it difficult to accept Sysson's allegation that Beckwith was the prime mover behind Sadler's purchase. If the receiver had had his eye on Selby from the first, why should he have adopted so circuitous a route to his objective, and one which involved him in the payment to his agent of so large a 'consideration' as the £194 pocketed by Whitreson, not to mention the £110 allowed to Sadler for the use of his name and influence? Beckwith was frequently in London in discharge of his duties, and he had direct access to the chancellor and officers of augmentations. If he wanted Selby when it first came on the market, would not his own influence at the Augmentations have been sufficient to secure it without the need to employ two intermediaries whose combined fees added more than 40 per cent to the original purchase price? On balance the testimony of Whitreson, with its abundance of detail, is the more acceptable, and is worth quoting at length. When asked whether the demesnes of Selby were first 'profferd to be sold to the sayd Sir Leonarde before they were proferde to be solde to any other',⁶ he replied:

that the said scite and demeanes of Selby aforeseid were not first profered to be sold to Sir Leonard Bekwith for he saith that att suche tyme as the said Sir Rauff Sadler did conclude with the Kynges

¹ P.R.O., E321/22/1. The date of this suit is uncertain but is probably 1544.

² P.R.O., E315/113, fo. 30.

³ P.R.O., E315/125, fo. 182.

⁴ P.R.O., E323/2B, Part I, m. 14.

⁵ For Whitreson's testimony see below. Beckwith's acknowledgment of this figure is in P.R.O., E315/125, fo. 182.

⁶ P.R.O., E315/113, fo. 29. Whitreson's deposition occupies fos. 30-34 of the same volume, the passage quoted commencing on fo. 31.

highenes and sued out the lettres patentes for the bargeyn and sale therof and of the granges of Thorpe and Stayner to the saide Sir Rauff the same Sir Rauff did promyse and graunt to this deponent that this deponent shuld have the premyssez for the som of one hundred and tenne poundes more than the said Sir Rauff did and shuld paye to the kynges highenes for the same/ and so this deponent did aggree with the said Sir Rauff for the purchas of the premyssez and gave to the saide Sir Rauff Sadler the said som of CX^{li} over and above the mony that the said Sir Rauff did and shuld pay to the kynges highenes for the purchas of the same/ and then this deponent havynge a commission of the said Sir Rauff Sadler to bargeyn and sell the premyssez or do with the same what he wold did ride into Yorkeshire myndyng to make mony of wodes of the premyssez and of leasses to be made of the granges of Thorpe and Stayner whiche were out of Oswald Syssons graunt / and within iij days after the comyng of this deponent to his house att Wilberfosse this deponent fell syke there of a great ague and contynued so syke by the space of a moneth and more and for that cause devised with his frendes to sell certyn wodes of the premyssez to make mony toward the later payment of the mony due to the kynges magestie for the said purchas and theruppon this deponent sent for one William Rydeard the Kynges highenes officer and baylyff of Pokelyngton and for Herry Smyth keper of the Kynges highenes parke of Newsam beside Wresyll declaryng to them beyng his frendes what mony he owed for Selby and desired and prayed them to take the payne to sell for this deponent as moche woodes att Selby as wold amount to CC marcs or CC^{li} and also to practise for hym who wold gyve best fynes for leasses to be made for the terme of xxj yeres of the granges of Thorpe and Stayner and this deponent for the execucion therof gave and graunted to them like commission and auctorite as he had of the said Sir Rauff Sadler and theruppon the said William Rydeard and Herry Smyth went to Hull and Beverley and declared that they had commission to sell the wodes of Selby and theruppon certyn persons of Hull and Beverley came thither and sawe the wodes but the said William Rydeard and Herry Smyth returnyng to this deponent with answer of theyr doynge in that behalf made relacion to this deponent that they could not make above LX^{li} of wodes to be paid before Cristemas then next ensuyng whiche som was to litell for that purpose. and for that that this deponent mystrusted and had no hope to recover from sykenes determyned with hymself by the advyse of his frendes to sell the said scite and demans of Selby and the said granges of Thorpe and Stayner and theruppon this deponent gave commission and full auctorite to the said William Rydeard and Herry Smyth to sell the premyssez for this deponent and appoynted then to goo to one Robert Grey of Beverley whom he thought to be of habilite and moste mete for that purpose. and theruppon the same William Rydeard and Herry Smyth went to the said Grey and proferid the sale of the premyssez to hym who proferrid viij^{ch} for the same wherof to be paid in hand CCC^{li} and the rest at days whiche offer this deponent refused. and afterward this deponent beyng syke rode to yorke

to Doctor Stevens house and so there beyng Sir Leonard Bekwith came thither to see this deponent declaryng to hym that he was sory for his sikenes and after dyverse other comunicacions betwene them the said Sir Leonard Bekwith said to this deponent that he herd say that this deponent had bought Selby of Sir Rauff Sadler and was mynded to sell away the same ageyn to whom this deponent said that it was true and declared to hym the cause why he wold sell it and then the said Sir Leonard Bekwith asked what he shuld paye for the same and after dyverse comunicacions therof this deponent aggredid for the bargeyn and sale of the premysses to the same Sir Leonard for the som of M^lXL^l wherof V^cXX^l to be paid att wilborfosse att all soules day then next and other V^cXX^l to be paid to this deponent att Candelmas even then folowyng and it was aggredid that the said Sir Leonard Bekwith shuld observe and kepe all suche promyssees and covenantes as was made by the said Sir Rauff Sadler to Oswald Sysson or any other person whiche promyssees and covenantes this deponent had promised to the said Sir Rauff to performe.

Here is surely a clear case of speculation. It appears from his narrative that Whitreson had little ready cash available for the purchase of Selby and was relying upon making enough from sales of wood and fines for leases to meet his obligations to Sadler and the king before the day of reckoning. Then his ague laid him low, his friends failed him, and he was obliged to abandon his original plans for the piecemeal disposal of the property and to seek a purchaser for the whole. He could not afford to wait for his fever to pass. The urgency of his situation is demonstrated by his rising from his sickbed to ride the eight miles from Wilberfoss¹ to York. How relieved he must have been when he found in Beckwith a purchaser prepared to give him so good a price, and able to pay so promptly!

It is a pity that the testimony of Sadler, which was called for by Beckwith,² was either not taken, or not preserved. It might have given his part in the transaction a better colour. As it is he appears of all the parties the least interested in the actual property of Selby, and to have been mainly concerned to turn the importunities of Sysson and Whitreson to good account. Whether he actually put up any of the purchase money himself, or relied upon Whitreson to find it for him, is not quite clear.³ If the latter was the case then the allegation of Sysson that the bulk of the purchase money came from Beckwith (in all likelihood out of the augmentation funds in his care) could well be true, though his charge of collusion between the receiver and Whitreson could not be substantiated. But it is Whitreson's activities and ambitions which are of the greatest interest.

¹ A small nunnery, suppressed 20 August 1539, formally leased to Whitreson in 35 Henry VIII (*L. & P.*, xix (1), p. 647). ² P.R.O., E315/125, fo. 182.

³ Sadler's recognisance for the payment of the purchase money to the Crown is dated 26 July 1540 (P.R.O., E323/2B, Part I, m. 14). Beckwith's payments to Whitreson were to be made on 2 Nov. 1540 and 2 Feb. 1541. I cannot find any details of the transaction between Sadler and Whitreson other than those given by Whitreson above.

Here is one case where the formal record of the Patent Rolls is not only inadequate but misleading. No hint of Whitreson's role as speculator and middleman appears in the record of the sale of Selby by Sadler to Beckwith. Only the chance that the receiver's conduct in this, and many other matters, was called in question by Sysson and others has preserved for us the details of the transaction. There may well be other cases of a similar nature. We should do well not to rely too exclusively upon the Patent Roll for evidence of the manner in which, and the persons by whom, the monastic lands were purchased.

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