

Walter Jones of Witney, Worcester, and Chastleton: Rewriting the Past

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SUMMARY

Walter Jones, born in Witney around 1550, rose in social status from his birth into the mercantile class to becoming a member of the gentry. His achievement is marked by the purchase and rebuilding of Chastleton House. The steps in his transition were fairly typical, taken by many in the upwardly mobile society of Elizabethan England. Walter consolidated the advantages as son, and nephew, of moderately wealthy and widely connected merchants by training in the law, being appointed town clerk of Worcester, as an attorney to the Court of Star Chamber, and subsequently as a Worcestershire Justice of the Peace. But though Walter's progress is clearly marked, his life is illuminated only at intervals and has long been burdened by myths. In dispelling that mythology it becomes possible to draw a more rounded picture of a local success story.

Many people have had a hand in fashioning the life of Walter Jones, born in Witney around 1550, later the owner and builder of Chastleton House. His first two biographers were family members, Miss Mary Whitmore Jones in 1909 and Margaret Dickins in 1938. Both reported family traditions, making some use of family papers, now held by Oxfordshire Record Office.¹ Both agreed that Walter was born in Witney around 1550 and attended Oxford University and the Inns of Court. They said he married Elinor, niece of Sir Thomas Pope of Wroxton, founder of Trinity College, Oxford. The money that enabled Walter to buy Chastleton in 1602 was earned by a career in the law; he died there in 1632 and is buried in the church. An undocumented assertion was offered in 1919 by the antiquarian dentist John Humphreys, who, in search of products from the tapestry looms set up in the Sheldons' nearby manor house at Barcheston, stated that Jones and Ralph Sheldon of nearby Weston, in Long Compton, *must* have been friends. He adduced no evidence, but his supposition is now regarded as incontrovertible fact.² In 1929 H. Avray Tipping presented a somewhat speculative account of Walter's family links to Witney in an attempt to explain Walter's marriage. Its real virtue lies in the precis of a document, the original of which has disappeared.³ These, then, are the 'facts' known about Walter Jones; few withstand closer scrutiny.

The first person to fashion his own image was Walter himself, in the pedigree which supported his claim to a coat of arms, now known only in part. To this, Walter apparently added the display of coats of arms in the house he built, misleading not only his contemporaries, but also later historians. His own propaganda has proved to be remarkably long lasting, for all the printed accounts have taken him at his own valuation; even the three most recent investigations reinforce, or even add to, the misinformation.⁴ None has explored the full documentation, or looked at the

¹ Mary Whitmore Jones, *The Gunpowder Plot and the Life of Robert Catesby, also an Account of Chastleton House* (London, 1909); Margaret Dickins, *History of Chastleton* (Banbury, 1938). The house is now owned by the National Trust: see the website <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-vh/w-visits/w-findaplace/w-chastleton.htm>.

² John Humphreys, 'Some recently discovered Elizabethan Sheldon tapestries', *Country Life* (9 Oct. 1920), pp. 463–4; idem, 'Elizabethan Sheldon tapestries', *Archaeologia*, 74 (1924), pp. 181–202, repr. With the same factual errors as *Elizabethan Sheldon Tapestries* (London, 1929).

³ H. Avray Tipping, *Chastleton House, Oxfordshire*, English Homes, 3, i (London, 1929), pp. 299–317, sketches Jones's life as then understood; see p. 300 for paraphrase of the pedigree found in BL MS Add.19,819, fols 35v–36.

⁴ P. W. Hasler, *House of Commons* (London, 1982), on a broad canvas and with several errors; James L. Bolton and Marjorie M. Maslen, eds, *Calendar of the Court Books of the Borough of Witney, 1538–1610*, ORS, 54 (1985); National Trust, *Chastleton House* (1997); Jonathan Marsden, 'The Chastleton inventory of 1633', *Furniture History*, 36 (2000), pp. 23–42.

independent contemporary evidence which both complements and contradicts the story usually presented. The story these documents tell is stranger even than the later elaborations.

The pedigree Walter constructed for himself was a fashionable rather than a factual exercise, designed to demonstrate the continuity of his lineage and, by implication, to establish a position in society. As known now, he claimed ancestry from Rees apTewdr, King of South Wales, descended from Cadwallader, King of the Britons. Avray Tipping records that Walter's original version traced his descent from Priam, King of Troy, and continued through Brutus, legendary conqueror, and subsequently King of Britain and builder of London. Brutus was an essential element in the genealogy of many aspiring Elizabethan gentlemen, derived from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain (Historia regum Britanniae)*, as were the fabled giants Gog and Magog, familiar also to city dwellers in the Low Countries. Their presence represented the appropriation of national symbolism by the mercantile class, eager to claim that their wealth conferred status similar to that arrogated by the aristocracy, a reference fitting his own and his wife's circumstances.⁵ Walter's lineage probably began to touch reality only in the fifteenth century with his Welsh relatives. The first on whom we can check is John Jones of Grismont, Monmouthshire, Walter's great-grandfather, whose son, Henry, may have been the first of the family to come to Witney. Henry's three sons were Walter, Giles, and Henry, the latter being Walter's father. In the light of Oxfordshire's known Welsh immigration, it seems perfectly plausible that the Witney family had indeed stemmed from the younger son of a family of Welsh origin sent out to make his way in the world.⁶

Walter's documented life starts with the will of his uncle Walter, who died in 1560.⁷ The cash bequests in the latter's extensive will total rather more than £675.⁸ Although no inventory survives to supply the minutiae of his household, the details of his lands, business interests, and possessions recorded in his will reveal a clothier with a thriving business, extensive local properties, and an active social conscience. Forty pounds was bequeathed to public causes – the building of a market house, the erection of a school, and the repair of Newbridge, over the river Thames, on the route south to Abingdon, Southampton, or London. Eight pounds was to be distributed between the poor of Witney, Burford, and poor spinners in Witney, while £5 was to pay for twelve sermons. Bequests were made to his apprentices, to his maids, and to several of his workmen. Perhaps the most illuminating bequest, suggesting that Walter was himself in a position to understand the difficulties and was himself trading abroad, was the £50 left to the Merchant Adventurers to fund loans which would allow two young men to begin trading in the Low Countries. More than one family member seems to have left Wales to settle in English towns connected with the cloth trade – Witney, Worcester, and London. Beneficiaries included his cousin Thomas, who appears to have lived in London, near Strand Bridge, territory outside the western walls, while Walter's three sisters were remembered, the most generous bequest being to Margaret, the widow of Henry Street, of the Worcester clothing family, and her son, Francis. To his brother Giles, also a Witney resident, Walter left £180 and to his two daughters £60 each. Walter's wife, Joan, was to have the use of the house for the rest of her life, after which it would pass to Henry, Walter's youngest brother. In a codicil special provision was made for Henry's son, our Walter, the only grandson and heir, 'for xii yeres being the whole nonage of Walter'. Giles Jones and Philip Box, a fellow Witney clothier, were made trustees of named lands, which later passed to Walter's bride as jointure.

Few details are known of Henry's life, at least until his own will was written in 1594; it suggests

⁵ Victor I. Sherb, 'Assimilating giants: the appropriation of Gog and Magog in medieval and early modern England', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 32 (2002), pp. 59–84, esp. 71–7; Frederick W. Fairholt, *Gog and Magog, the Giants in the Guildhall: their Real and Legendary History* (London, 1859); Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500–1700* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 20–3.

⁶ *VCH Oxon*, 14, p. 78.

⁷ He was buried in London, 16 Dec.: *Registers of Allhallows, Bread Street*, ed. W. Bruce Bannerman, Harleian Society, 43 (London, 1913), p. 160.

⁸ TNA PROB 11/44.

he too had successfully established himself as a clothier. The Witney court books reveal that he served as a bailiff, vestryman, and churchwarden. If the pedigree is to be believed, he married Ann Hiatt, about whom nothing is known.⁹ Henry, however, set his sights on higher things for Walter, not just his only son amongst eight daughters, but also the only male heir in the family. Henry seems to have entertained ideas beyond the horizons of Witney mills, perhaps encouraged, perhaps enabled to do so, because of the provisions of his brother's will. Marked out to move the family into the gentry, Walter undoubtedly enjoyed a comfortable start in life.

There is no certainty about the date of Walter's birth. The earliest Witney parish registers have not survived, and the conventional date, 1550, is derived from the age given in his portrait, now at Chastleton. It should probably be regarded as correct. His uncle's phraseology might suggest that Walter's minority came to an end at the age of 24, when he married and received his inheritance. Other children born to Henry – Cuthbert in 1552, Joan in 1554 – exclude a later date,¹⁰ because they tie in awkwardly with Walter's possible attendance at Corpus Christi College, Oxford; a Walter Jones received his B.A. in November 1570.¹¹ He would have fitted in well amongst Oxford students, for at the time it was very much the place for the further education, as much in the social graces as in higher learning, for the sons of middle-class families. If indeed he did matriculate, his education was not finished when he received his Bachelor's degree; it continued with enrolment at Lincoln's Inn in January 1572 to receive a training in the law, a more practical attainment for someone with his way to make in the world.¹² Soon afterwards his marriage was arranged. At this point fact and fiction diverge for the first time.

Modern accounts, starting with the family biographies, and, with one exception, followed ever since, declare that his bride was Elinor Pope, daughter of Henry Pope, assumed to be a brother of Sir Thomas Pope, founder of Trinity College, Oxford, and clerk in the Star Chamber.¹³ But Sir Thomas's only recorded brother was called John, and he had no child called Elinor.¹⁴ The assumption that Elinor was a niece never had any foundation. The marriage contract, dated 2 November 1573, surviving in the Oxfordshire Record Office, conclusively reveals her parentage.¹⁵ The implications of the surprising details it contains have not previously been studied.

The contract was signed between Henry Jones of Witney and his son Walter and Henry Mekys alias Pope, goldsmith, of London, and Helen his daughter. It gave Helen lands in Witney, Burford, and Curbridge, together with two fulling mills in Crawley; some can be identified with those bequeathed to Walter by his uncle. Without doubt, therefore, there is no connection with the Oxfordshire family of Pope. The first of the myths probably originated from a misinterpretation of the coat of arms over the fireplace in the Great Chamber at Chastleton House as those of Sir Thomas Pope.¹⁶ Neither was Henry Pope, whether incorrectly identified as the brother of Thomas or as Mekys alias Pope, ever the Master of the Queen's Jewels, one of the more recent myths to arise.¹⁷ No such title exists, and there is no reference to that name amongst the successive appointments as Master of the Jewel House throughout the sixteenth century, securely and continuously

⁹ Bolton and Maslen, eds, *Court Books of the Borough of Witney*. Hasler, *House of Commons*, says she was the daughter of Thomas Hill, but Thomas's will does not suggest this is so, TNA PROB 11/39. The will is currently listed incorrectly online as Thomas Hall, armourer. He is actually Thomas Hyll, armiger.

¹⁰ ORO, Witney parish register transcripts.

¹¹ Joseph Foster, ed., *Alumni Oxonienses, 1500–1714*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1891), B.A., Nov. 1570, possibly later a student of Lincoln's Inn.

¹² Joseph Foster, ed., *Records of Lincoln's Inn, Admissions, 1420–1799* (London, 1896), 1, p. 78.

¹³ *ODNB* for his life; W. H. Turner, ed., *The Visitations of Oxfordshire 1566 and 1574*, Harleian Society, 5 (London 1871), pp. 66, 152.

¹⁴ Bodl MS Rawlinson D 807, fol. 15v, pedigree of John Pope.

¹⁵ ORO holds the Chastleton deeds, E/24/5/D/1.

¹⁶ National Trust, *Chastleton House*.

¹⁷ Marsden, 'The Chastleton inventory', pp. 33–42, n. 4. The original is at ORO E 24/1/W2.

documented.¹⁸ The tale may have its origins in the Heralds' Visitations: in 1634 Elinor's father was recorded as jeweller to Queen Elizabeth.¹⁹ Anthony Wood, Oxfordshire's seventeenth-century gossip, embellishes that simple statement, referring to him as 'Pope ye jeweller, or belonging to the Jewell house'.²⁰ Later still, what in the original record was written with a small 'j' was in the printed version given a capital 'J'; it was subsequently interpreted as a title²¹ and has evolved into a 'fact'. It is unlikely that Mekys alias Pope was ever more than one of the many goldsmiths who supplied the court with jewellery. He would not have been alone, however, in describing himself as purveyor to the Queen.²²

Much more is now known about Henry Mekys alias Pope, an immigrant goldsmith born in the duchy of Cleves, whose territories lay in north-west Germany. Amongst the longest residents of the émigré community in London, then numbering some four to four-and-a-half thousand, Mekys alias Pope, like many of his compatriots, had found it advantageous to anglicize and alter his birth name. Pope had certainly arrived in London by 1551, when he took out naturalization papers, and by the time of the 1571 survey of strangers was recorded as having lived in London for at least twenty years, and possibly nearer thirty.²³ He had a house in Aldersgate, from which he must have run his business, for the names of his three apprentices, also émigré settlers, were recorded as also living there. While they attended the Dutch church, Pope attended his parish church, following the Anglican rites. Whether he felt sufficiently firmly established to abandon the legal protection offered by the strangers' church, or whether he had tired of the internal doctrinal disputes, in which he himself had been involved, is not clear.²⁴ It was, however, a decision which would serve him well in the future.

Goldsmithing, however, was not his only interest: he appears to have dabbled in techniques for 'roasting' of lead and copper ore and later to have reported to Walsingham on the success of his experiments with saltpetre.²⁵ In June 1577 he bought into a partnership with Sir William Waad, former clerk of the Privy Council, then employed on diplomatic missions abroad, in the patent the latter already held to make sulphur, brimstone, and oils.²⁶ Their monopoly had been granted for an exceptional thirty years and empowered the holders to take materials from any area of England. The obligations were twofold: to train apprentices for eight years, and to manufacture over three years a greater quantity of train oil than was imported into the kingdom in the same time. Train oil was used in the finishing processes for woven cloth, and when the patent started was being imported in large quantities. An attempt to encourage its manufacture at home was one of several projects designed to cut the high levels of imported goods. Whether the Waad-Mekys venture, its activities nowhere recorded, made a useful contribution is unknown, but by the end of

18 A. J. Collins, *Jewels and Plate of Queen Elizabeth: the Inventory of 1574* (London, 1955), p. 257, lists the holders of the appointment.

19 BL MS Harleian 1557, fol. 101v.

20 *Parochial Collections made by Anthony à Wood and Richard Rawlinson*, transcribed by F. N. Davis, ORS, 2 (1920), p. 85.

21 John Philipot, et al., 'Some Pedigrees from the Visitation of Oxfordshire ... 1634', *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica* (London, 1913), pp. 17–18.

22 Francis Pope of London described himself as 'draper unto the Quenes Majestie', Robert Cooke, *Visitation of London 1568*, ed. Sophia W. Rawlins, Harleian Society, 109, 110 (London, 1963), p. 54.

23 R. E. G. Kirk and E. F. Kirk, eds, *Returns of Aliens dwelling in the City and Suburbs of London from the Reign of Henry VIII to that of James I*, Publications of the Huguenot Society of London, 10, 4 pts (Aberdeen, 1900–08). His length of residence varies, but he can probably be identified with entries in pt i, pp. 312, 327, 411, 436; see also ii, p. 44.

24 *Kerkerads-protocollen der Nederlandsche Vluchtelingen-Kerk te Londen 1560–1563 [Resolutions of the Council of the Dutch Church in London 1560–1563]*, ed. A. A. van Schelven, Historisch Genootschap, Utrecht, series 3, no. 43 (Amsterdam, 1921), pp. 59, 60, 341, 366, 412, perhaps 104–5.

25 *CalSPD, 1547–80*, p. 457 (undated but ?1572); *CalSPD, 1581–90*, p. 30, on the success of an experiment.

26 *CPR, 1575–78*, no. 2257.

the century imports had dropped substantially.²⁷ Even to involve himself in such a project suggests a large disposable income.

Helen herself is frequently described as having been a maid of honour to Queen Elizabeth. By reason of her birth, however, she is not very likely to have occupied such a post. To my knowledge, the first reference to this occurs in the account of a visit to Chastleton by antiquarians in 1882.²⁸ Whether the information was contained in the original pedigree, formed part of family tradition, or was an antiquarian confusion with a documentary reference to a Mistress Jones, described as ‘mother of the Maids of Honour’, is unknown.²⁹ That lady is mentioned only once, in 1589, but at that late date, when Helen can be shown to be resident in Worcester and the mother of several children, it seems an unlikely identification.

At the time of the marriage contract in 1573 inter-marriage between English and stranger was still unusual.³⁰ One might speculate as to whether Uncle Walter had had commercial dealings with Pope, perhaps as a banker able to transfer funds to and from the Low Countries. Such unions would later become more frequent, and there was no legal prohibition, but prejudice against them existed in both communities. Certainly Pope left nothing to chance and took out naturalization papers for his daughter a month before the contract was signed, an odd precaution, given that she had almost certainly been born in England.³¹ Presumably both sides saw some particular advantage in the alliance – Henry Jones for his business or for his purse, while Henry Pope perhaps hoped to gain from the social status of the Jones family and, more particularly, from the bridegroom’s legal training, from which both pecuniary and social advantages might accrue. When, or where, the marriage took place is unknown.

For the next five or six years where the couple lived, and how, or even whether, Walter found employment remains unknown. As soon as he had completed sufficient training he presumably embarked on the legal career with which he is always credited, but of which there is little trace. The next definite mention comes in 1580–1, when he was admitted as a freeman of the city of Worcester; he was subsequently appointed as the collector of the fifteenth for Worcester.³² The link to the city must have come through his aunt Margaret, sister to his uncle Walter, who had married Henry Street, almost certainly the Worcester clothier.³³ Their son, Francis, Jones’s cousin, had already been bailiff and would subsequently represent the city in Parliament.³⁴ With what would seem to be remarkably little experience, in 1583, and possibly earlier, Walter became town clerk of Worcester.³⁵ His chief duty was to keep the city’s records and to provide legal advice to the city’s magistrates.³⁶ He was called to the Bar in November 1584, a common result of a civic

²⁷ A. M. Millard, ‘London’s import trade, 1600–40’, (London Ph.D. thesis, 1956), p. 38 [BL microfilm 197832]; L. Stone, ‘Elizabethan overseas trade’, *EconHR*, ser. 2, 2 (1949), pp. 30–58, at p. 48.

²⁸ ‘Excursion to Barton-on-the-Heath, the Rollwrights, and Chastleton June 15th 1888’, *Birmingham and Midland Institute Transactions, Excursions and Reports*, 15 (1888), pp. 67–72, 78–82.

²⁹ J. Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 vols (London, 1788), 2, p. 104, listed amongst those who gave the Queen gifts in 1588–9. The lady is unidentifiable; one possibility might be the wife of Henry Jones, Doctor of Civil Law, d.1592, whose will reveals his eminent contacts, TNA PROB 11/79.

³⁰ Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-century London* (Oxford, 1986), p. 289.

³¹ *CPR*, 1572–75, no. 666, 15 June 1573.

³² His admission is WRO, Worcester Corporation Records, Audit of Accounts [hereafter WCR,AA] (A.10 Box 2), 1, 1540–1600 (unpaginated), 1580–1; the return is ORO, E/24/1/F1/1.

³³ Walter Jones’s will, 1561, TNA PROB 11/44; Worcester Wills, 1576/292 and inventory 102a; Margaret’s husband, Henry, died in 1560: *ibid*, 1560/25. It has been stated that Walter of Chastleton owed the position to his maternal relatives; this seems to be incorrect, since no link can be traced to a mother called Ann, daughter of Thomas Hill of Worcester, see n. 9 above.

³⁴ Hasler, *House of Commons*; his will is TNA PROB 11/109, and of his widow, Margaret, TNA PROB 11/116, does not suggest continuing acquaintance between the families.

³⁵ WCR, AA, 1, 1540–1600, under 1582–3 (£3 10s.).

³⁶ Alan D. Dyer, *The City of Worcester in the Sixteenth Century* (Leicester, 1973), p. 200.

appointment of this sort. However, what is today regarded as higher status in legal circles would then have conferred little professional advantage.³⁷

Worcester was unusual amongst English cities in that one of the unspoken requirements of the appointment of any office-holder was that he should be resident. By 1585 Walter and Helen had certainly complied. Parish-register evidence suggests that they lived in St Helen's parish, right in the heart of Worcester city, for eight children were baptized there between October 1585 and April 1604; three were later baptized in St Michael's Bedwardine, Worcester.³⁸ Only his eldest son's birthplace is unknown. But there is no definite clue to, and no clear indication of, the sort or size of house he occupied.³⁹

From the early 1580s Worcester became the focus of his life. Despite his initial lack of experience, his post carried high social status and promised to be lucrative. The city may have offered him the opportunity to set up his own legal practice, for Worcester was not only an assize town, but also a place where the ecclesiastical courts held their sittings, and where numerous civil cases were heard. It was also a meeting place for the Council of the Marches.⁴⁰ Mindful of his own dependence on family connections for his good fortune, he was probably instrumental in arranging the marriage of his wife's sister, Abigail, to Godfrey Goldsborough, appointed canon of Worcester in 1581.⁴¹ Goldsborough's first wife was Judith, daughter of Thomas Wilson, dean of the diocese.⁴² Goldsborough's marriage to Abigail must have taken place around 1586; their second son, Henry, was born around 1590, their third around 1593.⁴³ Abigail's death is unrecorded, but probably preceded Goldsborough's translation to the see of Gloucester in July 1598.⁴⁴

Walter served four times as MP for the city – 1584, 1586, 1589 and 1593 – but he does not seem to have been a particularly industrious or outspoken member.⁴⁵ His duties in Worcester are unchronicled, but they would have brought him into contact with a wide range of people, whose presence, like his own, was demanded at the assizes held in the county town of Worcester. Only once does his life come into sharp focus in the records. In 1588 he was first threatened, and then claimed to have been attacked, by Richard Igmythorpe, the bailiff of the dean and chapter. Though its causes are now lost, the episode was severe enough to reach the Privy Council, which in July 1588 ordered the Council of the Marches to investigate Jones's allegations. There must have been a satisfactory resolution, for both parties remained in office.⁴⁶

About 1593 Jones resigned as town clerk, accepting appointment as the third attorney working for the Court of Star Chamber in London.⁴⁷ His duties were to liaise between the petitioner, using the court and the serving members of the Privy Council, who constituted the judges. His portrait, in which the petition in his hands bears the words 'Cam' Stell' [Star Chamber], commemorates his office. It is further embellished with a fashionable motto: 'Homo bulla pulvis est et umbra [Man

³⁷ Records of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn, *The Black Book*, 1422–1586, 1 (1897), p. 436, (fol. 364). W. R. Prest, *The Inns of Court under Elizabeth I and the Early Stuarts, 1590–1640* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 40–59, for the position of barristers.

³⁸ Worcester Local Studies Library, TS parish registers, St Helen's. At least two children died in infancy: Thomas, b.1586, and Thomas, b.1605.

³⁹ Dyer, *City of Worcester*, pp. 161–5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 208–10.

⁴¹ *ODNB*.

⁴² J. Foster, ed., *The Visitation of Yorkshire 1584/5 and 1612* (privately printed, 1875), p. 369, where the identification of Wilson as dean of Rochester is incorrect.

⁴³ Deduced from their ages at matriculation at Oxford: Foster, ed., *Alumni Oxonienses*.

⁴⁴ *ODNB*.

⁴⁵ Hasler, *House of Commons*.

⁴⁶ Identified from WCR, AA, 1, 1540–1600, where he is named, with several variations, from 1585–6 until at least 1595–6.

⁴⁷ Appointed an attorney of the Court of Star Chamber c.1592: John Guy, *The Court of Star Chamber and its Records to the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I*, PRO Handbooks, 21 (HMSO, 1985), pp. 15–16; TNA STAC 5/B4/27.

is a bubble, dust, and shadow]'.⁴⁸ The artist is unknown, and the portrait's authenticity has been disputed on the grounds that no link between Jones and the court was known. Ironically perhaps, in view of the larger inaccuracies which have remained unquestioned, it was always possible to demonstrate that there should have been little doubt about Walter's claim to his position.

Walter's father, Henry, died in February 1594, and his will reveals him to have been, like his much older brother, Walter, a prosperous clothier.⁴⁹ His wife had predeceased him, and there was no need to provide any more than an engraved gold ring for each of his eight daughters, all of them listed with their married names. His brother Giles was to receive only Henry's 'worst gown' and two shillings weekly; he died in March 1594. All but one of Giles's daughters received small bequests. Henry named those apprentices who were to receive sums large enough to be useful capital. The house in Witney, with some of its furnishings, went to his son-in-law, Thomas Cave. Walter received the residue; his absence of interest in the business had long been clear, and it was now unsuitable for him to pursue it.⁵⁰ Neither was there much need to make provision for him. In 1591 Walter purchased pasture and grazing in Ducklington, together with two mills, a fishery, and the advowson to the parish church, presumably as an investment.⁵¹ He was also taking further steps along the road to gentility. Later in the decade, as his own son, Henry, was reaching his teens, Walter's ambitions for him become clear. In July 1600, Henry, like his father before him, was enrolled at Lincoln's Inn, when Walter described himself as 'armiger', taken literally, a man entitled to bear arms.⁵² In November of that year the Council of Lincoln's Inn determined that 'Mr Walter Jones and his son shall have the next adjoining chamber in the hallfe storie (of the newe building next adjoining the gatehouse).'⁵³

It was around this time that Walter's right to use a blazon also borne by the Talbot earls of Shrewsbury, a lion rampant, was challenged. The dispute was resolved by the Heralds, who decided that both parties were entitled to its use. Walter was acknowledged to have already established 'by one scienced in antiquity' his own right to a coat of arms, while Elinor, whose foreign parentage gave her no such rights, was permitted to use as her own the arms of her son.⁵⁴ She does not seem ever to have availed herself of the privilege. Walter may perhaps have given thought to the visible signs of his rising status as early as the time of his marriage. His own arms, and a coat clearly intended to be those of a now unidentifiable Pope family – not those of Sir Thomas of Wroxton – are woven into a small tapestry, shown on a shield set amidst flowers. It remained at Chastleton until 1919, and was once credited to the Sheldon workshop at Barcheston, Warwickshire.⁵⁵ The tapestry shows no crest, and its stylistic traits indicate a date much earlier than the accepted 1600, possibly to the 1570s; this in turn suggests that it could well have been woven by a Flemish émigré weaver in London, rather than at Barcheston.

The next traceable step appears to be mildly contradictory, for, though the appointment is

⁴⁸ The portrait, by an unidentified artist, thus conveys authentic information; the source of the epigram may have been taken from G. Rollenhagen, *Nucleus Emblematum Selectissimorum* (Antwerp, 1611).

⁴⁹ Henry's will, TNA PROB 11/83.

⁵⁰ Walter's lack of interest in Witney is suggested by the absence of references in the court books: see Bolton and Maslen, eds, *Court Books of Witney*.

⁵¹ Ducklington TNA C 66/1369, m.37–8, and its sale in 1603, TNA CP 25/2/339/1.

⁵² *Records of Lincoln's Inn, Admissions 1420–1799*, 2, July 1599.

⁵³ Records of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn, *The Black Book, 1586–1660*, 2, p. 65 (fol. 65).

⁵⁴ W. A. Littledale, ed., *Grants of Arms, Crests and Confirmations*, Harleian Society, 86 (London, 1925), pp. 121–2. G. D. Squibb, ed., *Visitation of Oxfordshire 1669 and 1675*, Harleian Society, ns 12, (London, 1993), pp. 46–7 for illus.

⁵⁵ The tapestry, a small hanging (32 by 44 inches/0.81 m by 1.12 m) not a cushion cover is now Burrell Collection, Glasgow, 47.21. Sir Thomas Pope's arms are Per pale Or et Azur on a chevron between three griffins' heads erased, four fleur-de-lys counterchanged of the field; an alternative might be the arms of John Pope of Marnhull, Dorset: John P. Rylands, ed., *Visitation of Dorset 1623*, Harleian Society, 20 (London, 1885), p. 77. Neither is exactly represented on the tapestry. The now white leg of the chevron is probably an old repair in an unfortunate choice of colour. White thread is often used to show argent (silver); two chevrons argent might represent the arms of Fettiplace, the family into which Walter's heir married. Close examination of its reverse side might establish which thread represents the original.

concealed in the so-far unedited Patent Rolls, Walter appears as a serving JP in Worcestershire; recognizances taken before him are listed in August 1599.⁵⁶ Early in 1604, at the start of the reign of James I, he, like almost everyone in public office, took out a general pardon for any crime he might have committed.⁵⁷ A reference in 1610–11 suggests, however, that he had not resigned from his Star Chamber post, so he must have combined his duties in London with those in Worcester.⁵⁸

By now Walter had the funds to invest and, following fashion and aiming to establish a position in county society both for himself and for his heir, may already have been looking round for a property. The property that took his fancy, perhaps simply because it was on the market at the right time, was the rundown house and encumbered lands of Robert Catesby at Chastleton, lying just over the Worcestershire county boundary in Oxfordshire. A number of factors brought about its sale, and a number of reasons might have brought it to Walter's notice, including the gossip about the owner Walter must have heard in London by virtue of his position. Catesby, a Catholic, had been involved in a short-lived rebellion against Queen Elizabeth, masterminded in November 1601 by the impetuous, over-ambitious Earl of Essex.⁵⁹ Essex was beheaded, and his supporters saddled with heavy fines – in Catesby's case 4,000 marks (£2,666 *5s.6d.*). He had already borrowed twice against the property, raising £630 the first time from Sir Robert Dudley, illegitimate son of the Earl of Leicester, and later £3,000 from his father-in-law, Sir Thomas Leigh of Stoneleigh, Warwickshire, and his own distant cousins, Ralph Sheldon of Beoley, Worcestershire, and Weston, then in Worcestershire, his son, Edward, and John Throckmorton of Lipyat, Gloucestershire, and Little Rollright.⁶⁰ Catesby had no choice but to sell both the house and the manor, which consisted of eight messuages, three cottages, twelve tofts, two dovehouses, twelve gardens and orchards, together with 500 acres of land, 140 acres of meadow, 400 acres of pasture, 10 acres of woodland, and 200 acres of furze and pasture.

In May 1602, soon after the fine was apportioned, the estate was transferred to Walter Jones and his son, Henry.⁶¹ Like his earlier creditors, they too expressed their willingness to give Catesby time to redeem the property, which he appears to have regarded as a reasonable proposition. Curiously they also permitted him to continue living in the house. Catesby, however, was not cured of meddling and instigated the Gunpowder Plot of November 1605. Although popular tradition claims he was based at his mother's house at Ashby St Legers, Northamptonshire, nothing excludes the use of Chastleton, at the southernmost point in the network of houses owned by the conspirators or used by them for meetings.⁶² Catesby was killed in the pursuit which followed the plot's discovery. Almost by accident, Jones, his presence in Worcestershire rather than London attested by his arrest of some of Catesby's co-conspirators, was able to take vacant possession of his purchase, clearing off the annuities to Catesby's mother chargeable on the property.⁶³

Walter's first action was to pull down the old house so thoroughly that there is no trace of it, and even its site is unknown. He then had to engage seriously with the tasks of design, planning, and construction of an imposing, but nevertheless relatively small house (see Figure 1); it was

⁵⁶ No record of the appointment is known; it is deduced from the appearance of his name in J. Willis Bund, ed., *Worcester Quarter Sessions Records 1591–1643*, 2 vols (Worcester, 1899), now calendared in www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A, under Jones.

⁵⁷ He also described himself as 'of Chastleton' in a general pardon of 1604, ORO, E/24/1/L/1.

⁵⁸ TNA STAC 8/18/11, brought to my attention by Dr A. Rosen.

⁵⁹ A brief account of the plot is in the *ODNB*, under Robert Devereux. For Catesby, *CalSPD*, 1598–1601, p. 545, no. 33, Feb.1601; *CalSPD*, 1601–1603, p. 45, no. 91.

⁶⁰ ORO, E/24/1/1D/12; E/24/1/1D 15–16.

⁶¹ ORO, E/24/1/1D/19–20,21; the manor is described in ORO E 24/1/1D/9–10. He had sold the considerably less extensive Ducklington lands early in 1603 for £600: TNA CP 25/2/339.

⁶² Antonia Fraser, *The Gunpowder Plot: Terror and Faith in 1605* (London, 1996). One such meeting at Chastleton is recorded in January 1605.

⁶³ HMC, Hatfield, 18, p. 17, 13 Jan. 1606, for the arrest; ORO, E/24/1/1D/28,29; 26,29 May 1606, for Jones's final acquisition.

later listed as possessing fifteen hearths.⁶⁴ In May 1607 he arranged a marriage between his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, and George Greenwood, yeoman farmer with a house in the small hamlet nearby, a convenient base from which to conduct operations.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the Jones family continued to live in Worcester, still in St Helen's.

With them lived Henry, the eldest son, and his wife, since August 1609, Anne Fettiplace, from Childrey, Berkshire.⁶⁶ Their children's baptisms are recorded in the St Helen's parish registers.⁶⁷ Even when the house at Chastleton became habitable, sometime around 1612–13, according to a recent re-evaluation, it was never Walter's sole residence, for he can be found both through tax records and in the exercise of his duties as JP more clearly in Worcester than at Chastleton.⁶⁸ It seems doubtful, however, whether two further children baptized in St Michael's Bedwardine – John, born in 1612, and Jane, born in 1615, both of whom died in infancy – were his.⁶⁹

He was certainly in Worcester in July 1613 when, together with cathedral dignitaries, he witnessed the will of his nephew Henry Goldsborough.⁷⁰ Having provided the large sum of £40 for a monument to be raised to his mother, Abigail, and more for scholarships to poor boys at Worcester's grammar school, and a silver bowl for his Oxford college, the majority of Henry's bequests went to members of Walter Jones's family. It seems likely that Walter supervised the erection of the monument, still to be seen, albeit damaged, on the north wall of the north aisle of Worcester Cathedral. It displays, neither of them correctly, the arms of Goldsborough and of Pope, with the same blazons that Walter employed at Chastleton.⁷¹ It was only several years later that Walter withdrew from Worcester society.

Quite why Walter should have chosen to acquire Chastleton in particular is unclear, even though it lay close to one of the roads between Worcester and London, both places in which Walter had business. Its remote situation scarcely introduced him either to county, or even to local, society, for even his nearest neighbours, Tracy at Toddington, Gloucestershire, Cope at Hanwell, Fiennes at Broughton, and the two Sheldon families at Broadway, Worcestershire, and Weston in Long Compton, were all more than ten miles away. He does not seem ever to have enjoyed a wide local circle, and marriages for his children were not forthcoming. His second son married Ann Dews of Powyke, Worcestershire. His second daughter married Ralph Holte of Stoke Lyne, Oxfordshire, his third married far afield, to William Bankes, in Lancashire.⁷²

The assertion that he enjoyed a close friendship with Ralph Sheldon, living at Weston, is therefore rather odd, still more so since Ralph died in January 1613, around the time at which the building of Chastleton is now thought to have been completed. But that friendship originated as a supposition put forward in the 1920s by John Humphreys – undocumented speculation necessary to establish a link between the two men – which would then justify his own claim that the five large tapestries found at Chastleton in 1919 were products of William Sheldon's effort, outlined in his will of 1570, to introduce tapestry weaving at the family's manor house at nearby Barcheston.⁷³

⁶⁴ M. Weinstock, ed., *Hearth Tax Returns for Oxfordshire 1665*, ORS, 21, p. 186.

⁶⁵ ORO, E24/1/3D/4.

⁶⁶ ORO, E24/1/1D/34.

⁶⁷ Worcester Local Studies Library, parish register transcripts or IGI, under Jones.

⁶⁸ TNA E 115/230/16 suggests residence in Worcester in July 1610, and a long series of certificates that he was liable until 1619: E 115/230/108; Willis Bund, ed., *Quarter Sessions Records*: see n. 56 above.

⁶⁹ Worcester Local Studies Library, St Michael Bedwardine parish register transcripts. There was another Walter Jones with property at Rock, Worcestershire.

⁷⁰ Henry Goldsborough's will, WRO, 1613/74. The relationship to Jones was examined in correspondence in ORO, E 24/1/G/3, the results of which have become fact in the National Trust Guide. Sir Thomas Pope's arms had four fleur-de-lys counterchanged of the field; Abigail's had only three fleur-de-lys. Neither is exactly the arrangement seen now in the Great Chamber.

⁷¹ W. M. Ede, *The Cathedral Church of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary of Worcester: its Monuments and their Stories* (Worcester, 1925), p. 10.

⁷² Philipot et al., 'Some pedigrees from the Visitation of Oxfordshire 1634', p. 18.

⁷³ Humphreys, 'Elizabethan Sheldon Tapestries', p. 191; V. & A. Archives, Whitmore-Jones, MA/1/ W 1719, letter Humphreys to Kendrick 3 Sept. 1919.

In the early twentieth century ‘Sheldon’ products were virtually unknown; even their possible existence was only just beginning to excite interest. When Humphreys, eager but antiquarian seeker of those products, came face to face with five large tapestries, he believed firmly that he had found what he sought. One contained the woven date 1595; four were described (albeit incorrectly) as having the initials WI and EI, long interpreted by their descendants as those of Walter and Elinor Jones. In the belief that by then Jones owned Chastleton, Humphreys stated firmly that Jones and Sheldon *must* have been acquainted, and that therefore Jones had bought the tapestries at Barcheston. There were, however, several mistakes in the syllogism. As we have seen, not only did Jones not own Chastleton in 1595, but he was resident in London as much as in Worcester. It has already been shown that he was certainly not in Witney, as 1920s information maintained. Jones therefore had access to wider markets than the small provincial workshop.⁷⁴ Of course, it may be that there was a prior acquaintance; at the very least Jones could hardly have helped hearing the gossip when Sheldon appeared in Worcester at the time of the assize court of 1584–5 with armed retainers, protection against his angry son-in-law.⁷⁵ Later, gossip about Sheldon’s involvement in plots against the Queen in the 1590s would also have been known to Jones from his own presence, as well as his contacts, in London. Humphreys’ claim, held to be substantiated by the Sheldon arms in the room named after the family, is otherwise undocumented, in doubt, and not the certain fact that it has become. The Sheldon arms, borrowed like those of Pope and the possibly fictional, untinctured arms above the fireplace in the Fettiplace Room, might, still incorrectly, be connected with the Sheldon family at Broadway, who held leases on Chastleton property until the late 1620s.⁷⁶

One of our last glimpses of Walter’s contacts comes from the lawsuit brought against him by his son-in-law Ralph Holt, husband of Walter’s second daughter, Elinor.⁷⁷ Ralph accused his father-in-law of trying to gain control of his lands, in the guise of saving Ralph from his debtors, and of selling the estate timber, valued at more than £2,000, to do so. Walter’s response was brisk – but detailed. In court he enumerated Ralph’s debts, denied the sale of timber, drew attention to the further loan Ralph had accepted, but which he had not mentioned, and described at length the several meetings held between the parties to seek resolution. It is clear that considerable pressure had been brought to bear on Ralph. Amongst those he had to answer to was his ‘uncle at law’ Hugh Fairclough, ‘an honest and learned divine’, and Charnell Petty, possibly a relation on the Jones side.⁷⁸ The outcome is unknown, but Elinor and her younger son, Walter, both died at Chastleton several decades later.⁷⁹ It may be that the Doctors’ Chamber, named in the 1633 inventory, was called after this family, for Ralph’s brother, Thomas, was a B.D. by 1627. Bequests in his will of 1659 reveal that he died as minister of Thrapston, Northamptonshire.⁸⁰

The clearest picture of Walter Jones’s success lies in the house he built, with its elaborate plaster ceilings and painted heads in the Great Chamber. The probate inventory, compiled in 1633 after his death, provides some idea of the comfort and the goods which surrounded him. It reveals a substantial investment in plate (£221), followed by his linen (£180), and the beds (£169). Each of these categories far exceeded the value of the three sets of tapestry hangings (£60), while the

⁷⁴ More recent examination shows that two tapestries are initialled MI and EI, leaving open the question of which initial is the correct original, and that one at least of the five pieces is closely, if crudely, based on a Brussels model, while the thematic content of the cartoons has become muddled: see Hilary L. Turner, ‘Tapestries once at Chastleton House and their influence on the image of the tapestries called Sheldon: a re-assessment’, *AntJ*, 88 (2008), pp. 313–43, <http://www.tapestriescalledsheldon.info/pdfs/NEWPP41Chastletonrevision.pdf>

⁷⁵ TNA STAC 5/R41/32 and STAC 5/R12/34 of 1585.

⁷⁶ In 1628 William, probably Ralph Sheldon’s nephew at Broadway, was amongst other mortgagees for a piece of land, ORO, E/24/1/4D/6.

⁷⁷ *VCH Oxon*, 6, p. 316; TNA C 3/311/18.

⁷⁸ Possibly the chorister of Magdalen College, later chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Foster, ed., *Alumni Oxonienses*; Charnell Petty is not certainly identified.

⁷⁹ ORO, Chastleton parish registers, burials, 1652, 1668, where Elinor is entered as Ellen.

⁸⁰ Foster, ed., *Alumni Oxonienses*, B.D. in 1627; Will, TNA PROB 11/288.

arras coverings for stools, beds, tables, or cupboard cloths totalled only £30. The total value of his goods was actually £1,141, although it was recorded by the appraisers as £1,935.⁸¹ His austere and economically phrased will made only conventional, brief bequests: his wife was to have her jewellery and be permitted to live in the house if she chose, the eldest son to share ownership. Care of the orphan children of his son John was entrusted to the family, and £200 was to be paid to his son Thomas.⁸² Walter was buried in the church at Chastleton.

If the remote location of the house mirrors Walter Jones's isolated position in local circles, it also shows how far he had travelled, socially at least, from his origins. His life had followed a fairly typical course for an aspiring, moderately well-off man in the upwardly mobile social conditions of Elizabethan England. It is, nevertheless, a success story, although where some have had greatness thrust upon them, it would be true to say of Walter Jones that he has had myths heaped upon him. Some stem from his anxiety to obliterate his own, and his wife's, origins in trade. Hence the pedigree and, presumably, the curious display of coats of arms belonging to families other than his own which decorate Chastleton House. It can only be Walter who created the ethos which in 1634 prompted his heir, Henry, to describe his grandfather to the Heralds of 1634 as 'Jeweller to Queen Elizabeth'. It was certainly Walter who set the pattern followed by several successive generations of marriage into a London family. Only one family member achieved a public position: Henry (1622/3–1694/5), became Chancellor of the diocese of Bristol.⁸³ For many others the commodious house became a last home in their declining years. Surviving documents indicate the family's severely reduced circumstances - for example, the 1738 inventory and the later list of goods brought into the house.⁸⁴ When John Henry Whitmore-Jones inherited the property in 1828 his diaries record very necessary improvements and, despite the evidence of eighteenth-century tapestries sold in 1920–1, only some frivolous spending.⁸⁵ His daughter was the first to be interested in the family history, and it is she who recorded the mixture of antiquarian lore based on the coats of arms, the misunderstanding of the Heralds' records, and the belief in Elinor's position as a maid of honour. Walter Jones now occupies a place beyond the boundaries of Oxfordshire history in which he played so little part in his lifetime, his reputation based as much on the curious clues he left behind as on the curious accretion of errors to which they have given rise.

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⁸¹ Marsden, 'The Chastleton Inventory', p. 42, where he pointed out that the totals do not add up.

⁸² ORO, E/24/1/W/1 written 21.10.1628, or TNA PROB 11/162.

⁸³ Henry's will TNA PROB 11/391. His uncle Gilbert, confused with another Gilbert Jones of All Souls (Foster, ed., *Alumni Oxonienses*), was never Chancellor of Wells, National Trust, *Chastleton House*, pp. 9–10.

⁸⁴ ORO, E/24/1/F2/3, 1738 Inventory.

⁸⁵ The diaries are kept at the House and can be seen on request. Tapestries described in *Country Life*, 45 (1919), pp. 90–6, 116–23, sold at Sotheby's, London, 18 Feb. 1921, lots 139, 140, included a valuable eighteenth-century chinoiserie example.



Figure 1 Chastleton House, Oxfordshire, the south front, built by Walter Jones, between 1606 and 1613. *Photograph, the author* ©