The Background to the Sacheverell Riots of 1714 and 1715 in Birmingham and the Sutton Coldfield Connection

By Roy Billingham

Henry Sacheverell, by Thomas Gibson, c.1710

In the autumn of 1714 the townsfolk of Sutton Coldfield were witnesses to an event that occurred at their parish church that was symptomatic of the religious and political passions which were rife at this period both in the Midlands and elsewhere in Britain. Jacobitism was like a smouldering fuse that burnt for many years creating social unrest and threatening mayhem, and Sutton Coldfield played a minor role in this state of affairs in the Midlands. Queen Anne had recently died and the Nation was facing up to the Hanoverian succession that was bitterly opposed by many sections of society who were either in favour of a hereditary royal succession or were against the imposition of a foreign king. However, it perhaps will help our understanding of these turbulent events if we consider the elements of British history that contributed to this situation.

Following the controversial 'warming-pan' birth of James Francis Edward Stuart in 1688 to Mary of Modena, James II's second wife and a Catholic whose babies had previously either miscarried or died in infancy, and after receiving a written invitation

from four Whig lords and three Tories, the Calvinist William III of Orange landed at Brixham on November 5, 1688, with the intention of dethroning the unpopular and despotic Catholic King James II. William and his army marched on London and James II fled to France. William agreed eventually to accept the crown jointly with his wife Mary Stuart in May 1689. It was thought by the ministry that this Glorious Revolution would give the general impression that the Stuart line of succession had been followed and was therefore still valid.

Ever since that Glorious Revolution, political party feeling had run high; the 1689 Bill or Declaration of Rights settled succession to the throne making Princess Anne and her descendants in line of succession after William and Mary. They were to be followed by any descendants of William by a future marriage. Parliament, under the control of the Whigs but supported by the Tories, jointly made it impossible for the Crown to dispense with or suspend laws made in Parliament. At the same time Parliament diminished the powers of the Church of England who were supported by the Tories. The Crown could not raise taxation except through Parliament and it could not have a standing army without the consent of Parliament. The Bill ordered that the Crown should allow elections to Parliament to be free and to be held at frequent intervals. Finally, and most importantly, the Bill declared it *'inconsistent with the safety and welfare of this Protestant kingdom'* for the monarch to be Papist or to be married to a Papist.

William and Mary did not have any children. Princess Anne and her husband, Prince George of Denmark, suffered personal tragedies. He had a drinking problem and she had twelve miscarriages; none of their other five children survived into adulthood. As a result of this crisis of succession, the 1702 Act of Settlement was passed which reaffirmed the 1689 Bill of Rights that no Catholic could ever be king. Furthermore, and after a prolonged search for the nearest Protestant link with the Tudor and Stuart dynasties, it stated that if Anne died without children the throne would pass to the German Hanoverians, namely the impeccably Protestant Sophia, who was a granddaughter of James I as well as Electress Dowager of the insignificant north German principality of Hanover. The link with the royal line was thus made, even if it was a very tenuous and contentious one.

On Queen Anne's accession in 1702 political matters became worse. The architect of the next war in Europe had been King William III but following his death and within two months of her accession it was left to Anne to make the declaration of war on May 5 against France and Spain in what became known as the War of the Spanish Succession. The cost of the war in terms of trading difficulties and increased taxes, to say nothing about the social consequences, was to overshadow most of Anne's reign. A series of military victories by John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, strengthened England's negotiating position at the end of the war.

Anne's reign was marked by the development of the two-party system as the new era of parliamentary governance took shape and matured. Anne, in spite of her wish to be 'queen of all her subjects', preferred the Tory party but she endured the Whigs. The Whigs supported limited monarchy and their support tended to come from religious dissenters whereas the Tories favoured a strong monarchy and the religious status quo embodied in the Church of England. In England the Tories generally opposed

allowing a foreigner to succeed to the Throne, whilst the Whigs favoured a Protestant successor regardless of nationality.

Following the Revolution, the concessions that were made to Dissenters aroused deep hostility amongst many Anglicans convinced that the church, and with it the entire social and moral order that it underpinned, was in danger. Anne had been raised as a strict Protestant and she was devoted to the Anglican Church. It was said that she favoured the Jacobite* or High Church side, but the Jacobite tag was a wild rumour put about by certain high Tories. The enemies of the Whigs took courage, and churchmen entered the lists against them.

One of these churchmen was Dr. Henry Sacheverell (1674?-1724), whose first preferment was the small vicarage of Cannock in Staffordshire. According to the Birmingham historian, Catherine Hutton Beale, he has been described, perhaps rather superficially, as *"a clergyman of narrow intellects and over-heated imagination"*,[1] and was raised into temporary importance by party spirit. The Dictionary of National Biography states that he advocated the High-Church and Tory cause in his pamphlets and sermons, and violently abused Dissenters, low churchmen, latitudinarians, and Whigs. His sermons on political and ecclesiastical matters attracted special attention owing to his striking appearance and energetic delivery.[2] He was a popular preacher who delivered fiery High Church sermons with a stentorian voice.

Henry was the son of Joshua Sacheverell, of St. John's College, Oxford, rector of St. Peter's Church in Marlborough, Wiltshire, and his wife, Susannah Smith. Due to his father's large family and consequent rather poor circumstances at the time of his death in 1684, Henry was adopted by his godfather, Edward Hearst, an apothecary, and his wife, who sent him to Marlborough Grammar School. After Hearst's death, his widow, Katherine, provided for the boy and sent him on August 28, 1689 to Magdalen College, Oxford, where he was elected to a demyship**. He was a student there until 1701 and a fellow from 1701 to 1713.

Although he had been officially reprimanded in his final year for his obstinate and wilful rebelliousness towards the dean of arts, he graduated with a BA on 30th June 1693, and gained his MA degree on May 16, 1695 when the Bishop of Oxford also ordained him deacon. However, in 1697, on his application for the curacy of Cannock in Staffordshire Bishop Lloyd of Lichfield refused to ordain him a priest, claiming him to be very ignorant in divinity and his Latin to be inadequate, a charge that Sacheverell defended strongly. In order to justify his refusal, the Bishop sent for books to convince him of his faults; one could, perhaps, deduce that on a personal level the Bishop did not like Sacheverell and would not be happy to have the maverick clergyman in his see. However, the High-Church Dean of Lichfield, Lancelot Addison, in contrast to his bishop, supported Sacheverell who had become a

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* Those who favoured the Old Pretender, James Stuart, were called Jacobites, from *Jacobus*, the Latin name for James. They were supporters of the deposed King James II and his descendants after the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, which placed William of Orange and his wife Mary Stuart on the throne.

A **demyship was a scholarship offering free lodging awarded at Magdalen College, Oxford, by enactment from 1536.
Oxford English Dictionary, (1933 Ed.), Vol. III D-E, Oxford, OUP [SCRef.L: REF 423]

friend of his own son, Joseph*, the poet and essayist, while they were both sharing a room at Magdelen. On a second application for ordination and on the recommendation of the Bishop of Oxford he was successful and took up the curacy of Cannock in Staffordshire, this being a living in the gift of the dean and chapter of Lichfield. He also held the curacy of Aston, near Birmingham, where his earliest patron was the father of Sir Lister Holte of Aston Hall, the Holtes being staunch anti-Dissidents.[3]

In 1701 he returned to Oxford to take up a fellowship at his old college and he was elected pro-proctor in 1703. Despite being disliked by many of his colleagues for his overbearing arrogance and conceit, as well as for his drunken exploits[4], he advanced in the university, where he was admitted as a BD on January 27, 1707 and created a DD on July 1, 1708 at the unusually early age of thirty-four, and in Magdalen College, where he became senior dean of arts in 1708 and bursar in 1709.

Later Sacheverell was mean spirited enough to libel the prelate in a tract entitled *The Character of a Low Churchman* and treated his mother's benefactor, Bishop Burnet, in a similar fashion. As if this were not enough, when he was presented with the small living of Cannock in Staffordshire he fell in both there and at Oxford with the worst firebrands of the High Church and the Jacobites. He made scurrilous reflections on the death of King William and the Hanover Succession. He was proceeding in this manner when his friends got him preferment to the chaplaincy of St. Saviour's, Southwark, in May 1709[5].

During this period the High Church interest was active and in 1709 George Sacheverell, who Henry claimed as a relative, was appointed High Sheriff of Derbyshire, where he owned property at Callow and he appointed Henry as his chaplain. George had also inherited the New Hall Estate at Sutton Coldfield from his father, Valens Sacheverell, who was a natural son of Henry Sacheverell of Barton, near Nottingham. There seems to be some serious doubt as to the genealogical relationship between George Sacheverell and the Rev. Henry Sacheverell; although often referred to as cousins in contemporary accounts, the term should be considered in its broadest interpretation with the probability that there was no blood relationship whatsoever. There is a suggestion that he may have been a descendant of one of the fourteen children of Radulph, or Ralph, Sacheverell, the great-great-grandfather of William Sacheverell (-1691) for whom no pedigree exists.[6] Local historian Riland-Bedford suggested that George had probably become acquainted with his namesake when Henry held the living of Cannock.[7] Both men were ardent Jacobites, but the assize sermon that Henry preached, *'The Communication of Sin'*, at All Saints Church in Derby on August 15, 1709 upset the Whigs, especially Henry Chadwick, the Deputy Sheriff of Derbyshire, who was a nephew of the Sheriff and whose father was

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* Joseph Addison (1672-1719) was born in Wiltshire and from 1683 lived in Lichfield after his father was appointed Dean of Lichfield. He was educated at Lichfield deanery school before going to Charterhouse, where he stayed for only a year before being elected to his father's former Oxford college, Queen's, at the age of 15. In 1689 he had been elected to one of the demyships at Magdalen Colleges, Oxford, where he studied classics. At Charterhouse he was to make a friend of Richard Steele who was later to become the founder of ***The Tatler***. He published a range of his work in various periodicals including ***The Tatler***, ***The Spectator*** and ***The Guardian***. In 1707 he became a Member of Parliament, a position he was to retain for the rest of his life. From 1713 he lived at Bilton Hall near Rugby. He and Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729) were members of the famous Kit-Kat Club.

an enthusiastic Whig. Chadwick, who was representing his uncle, took exception to a passage in the dedication to the High Sheriff in which he referred to the age as one in which *"the principles and interests of our Church and Constitution are so shamefully betrayed and run down"*. As Henry Sacheverell descended from the pulpit, Henry Chadwick exclaimed, *"You'll be at Rome before you are aware, doctor",* intimating that he would be compelled to follow the deposed king, James II, into exile.[8] This sermon was published with a dedication to the High Sheriff and the Grand Jury and was distributed through a bookseller in Lichfield, possibly Michael Johnson, Samuel Johnson's father[9].

Dr. Henry Sacheverell, after Anthony Russel – *National Portrait Gallery*

Following his Derby sermon Henry was invited by the Tory Lord Mayor of London, Sir Samuel Garrard, to give a sermon at St. Paul's to the assembled aldermen and council for the annual celebration of November 5, 1709 – Gunpowder Plot Day.

Henry chose as his theme *'The Perils of False Brethren in Church and State'* in spite of the resolution passed the same month by both houses of parliament that the Church was *'in flourishing condition'*, and that whoever seditiously insinuated the contrary should be proceeded against as *'an enemy to the Queen, the Church, and the Kingdom'*. He took the occasion to defend the doctrine of non-resistance, and to inveigh against the Toleration Act and Dissenters; he also spoke of the Glorious Revolution as an unrighteous change, and declared the Church of England in danger from toleration and the neglect of the Whig ministry. He pointed at these Whig ministers as the false friends and real enemies of the Church. His sermon was a thinly veiled attack upon the government, the Revolution settlement, and by implication the Hanoverian Succession. It so pointedly attacked Lord Godolphin, the head of the Whig ministry, that the Whigs considered his comments to be treasonable. The language of both the assize and the St. Paul's sermons was extremely violent. Despite opposition from the aldermen, the St. Paul's sermon was printed with a dedication to the Lord Mayor. The printer Henry Clemens ran off 1,000 copies in quarto at 1*s*. each and between 35,000 and 40,000 in octavo at 2*d*. each. A second edition by Clemens and many pirated editions, some selling for as little as 1*d*., accounted for sales in the region of a prodigious 100,000 copies.

On December 13, John Dolben, the son of the previous Archbishop of Canterbury, called the attention of the House of Commons to both sermons and, after debate, they were declared by the House to be *'malicious, scandalous, and seditious libels, highly reflecting upon Her Majesty and her government, the late happy Revolution, and the Protestant succession'*. The next day Sacheverell and the printer of the sermons, Henry Clements, appeared at the bar of the House and Sacheverell admitted to ownership. Clements was released but the House ordered that Sacheverell should be impeached for high crimes and misdemeanours, and he was committed to the custody of the sergeant-at-arms.

He petitioned for bail on 17 December, but his petition was refused on the 22nd by 114 votes to 79 and this was followed by the articles of impeachment, which were agreed by 232 votes to 131. It was felt that a trial before the bar of the House of Commons would be too lenient a procedure since the doctor would be free from confinement at the end of the parliamentary session. So it was therefore decided to impeach him before the House of Lords and the articles of impeachment drawn up by the Commons were presented to the Lords on 12 January, 1710. Sacheverell, having been transferred to the custody of the officer of the House of Lords, was granted bail on 14 January in the personal sum of £6,000 and two sureties of £3,000 each from two Oxford dons, Dr. Lancaster, the vice-chancellor, and Dr. Bowes, fellow of All Souls. On the 25 January Sacheverell submitted a bold, resolute and intemperate answer to the articles.

By 1710 the hardships caused by the war with France were causing social unrest in England and the cost of living was rising alarmingly, so much so that the government introduced lotteries in order to raise money. Amidst these problems, which included food shortages, hardships were starting to be felt by the people, seamen were going unpaid; there were increased charges on many items including candles, beer and coal. Also there was a growing resentment against the refugees arriving in London when so many people up and down the land were receiving parish relief. All this contributed to the public excitement caused by Sacheverell's militancy. So the government decided

to make a public spectacle of the trial of Henry Sacheverell in the hope that it would prove a useful distraction and unite the nation behind the arrest of Sacheverell.

The fundamental point of contention in Sacheverell's impeachment was whether the British monarchy was based on hereditary or parliamentary right. The Whigs, united in their support of the Glorious Revolution, believed that James II had broken his regal contract with the British people by his controversial actions. However, their divulgence that the 'warming-pan' story in 1688 was a convenient lie weakened their case for the Hanoverian succession and left them open to Jacobite claims that the hereditary heir was being penalized for the sins of his father.

On the other hand, the Tories, although being fundamentally divided about the succession, supported Sacheverell against the Whig attack on the political liberties of the Anglican clergy. The impeachment of Sacheverell had the effect of uniting the Tories in their opposition to the government.

In the country the feeling was strongly on Sacheverell's side and the groundswell of sympathy and support for the doctor became clearer each day that passed. Numerous pamphlets were published in his favour, prayers were requested for him in many London churches, and crowds began to gather on the streets in support of him. The Whig government realised that time was not on their side and tried to hurry the start of the trial. However, the Tories seized a chance to delay the proceedings and gain maximum publicity by successfully moving that the entire House of Commons should be accommodated in Westminster Hall for the trial. There was to be much pomp and ceremony and Sir Christopher Wren was called upon to erect special wooden scaffolding in the Hall to provide sufficient seating for both houses of parliament and an anticipated one thousand or more spectators, including an area in which the queen and her ladies could attend incognito. The delay caused by these arrangements gave time for public excitement to reach a fever pitch. Prayers for Sacheverell were requested in many London churches; he was praised in sermons and the royal chaplains openly encouraged and praised him.

Because of these arrangements in Westminster Hall the opening day of the trial was delayed until 27 February, 1710 and the trial lasted for three weeks. On his journey there from his lodgings in the Temple his coach was followed by six others and was surrounded by a vast multitude shouting wishes for his long life and safe deliverance, wanting to kiss his hand, and every head was uncovered as he passed. For their part the Tories promoted Sacheverell as their martyr and mascot in an effort to make the Whig administration uncomfortable.

Acting for the prosecution were the attorney general, Robert Eyre, the solicitor general, Sir Thomas Parker, and Sir Joseph Jekyll. Sacheverell's counsel comprised Sir Simon Harcourt, Constantine Phipps and three others. He appeared in court ostentatiously surrounded by several of the chaplains of the Queen. Queen Anne, despite her illness, attended each day in a private capacity and was carried in her sedan chair from St. James' Palace to hear the proceedings. She was greeted by the crowd with shouts of *'God bless your majesty and the church. We hope your majesty is for Dr. Sacheverell'*.

The first three days were taken up by speeches from the prosecution side that not only bitterly attacked Sacheverell but clearly outlined Whig views about toleration of Protestant Dissent.

Riots broke out on the night of the third day of the trial, the so-called Sacheverell Riots, and soon the cry was raised, *'Down with the Dissenters! High Church for ever.'* Six dissenting chapels were attacked and gutted, the houses of several leading Whigs were threatened. The Tory mob then bayed for the storming of the Bank of England which they believed was full to the roof of golden guineas. This was too much for the government who took immediate action and the mob was only kept in check by the horse and foot guards. Trevelyan describes the events as *'a storm of popular passion…raging in minds quite incapable of distinguishing these nice points in the theory of the* constitution'[10].

On the morning after the riots the trial continued to hear Sacheverell's defence. This was led most eloquently by Sir Simon Harcourt but also Sacheverell read out his own defence that was very ably written, probably by another. He treated the dock as a pulpit and presented his case brilliantly in his own inimitable fashion knowing that his words would be published and disseminated before his trial was at an end. On 20 March, at the end of the trial, the Lords found him guilty by 69 votes to 52, the thirteen bishops who voted being seven for a guilty verdict and six in favour of acquittal.

Sentence was pronounced on 23 March. The government had wanted Sacheverell to be forbidden from preaching, fined and imprisoned but the Lords decided that he should only be suspended from preaching for three years but was to be left at liberty to carry out his other clerical functions, and to accept preferment during that period. This verdict was largely due to Queen Anne who felt that although he was guilty he should only be given a light punishment, *'least the mobb* (sic) *appearing on his side should occasion great commotions and that his Impeachment had been better left alone'*[11]. His two assize sermons were ordered to be burnt by the common hangman in front of the Royal Exchange.

The impeachment of Sacheverell produced the explosion that shattered the Whig ministry of Anne. This lenient sentence was felt to be a triumph for him and the High-Church and, not least, the Tory party who used it as an electioneering platform for the general election to be held in September of 1710. The news of the verdict appeared to be received with extraordinary enthusiasm throughout the kingdom with great rejoicings being made in London, Oxford and other towns for a period of several days. Sacheverell had been inadvertently made a hero and he made a triumphant progress through the Midlands and West Country where he was received by crowds of admirers with every demonstration of enthusiastic homage. It was said that the ladies were enthralled by him and filled the churches wherever he read prayers. They pleaded with him to baptise their children and named several of them after him[12].

On the 10 June following his trial he set out to travel to Selattyn, a village four miles north of Oswestry, in the County of Shropshire. The reason for his journey was that during his trial he had been presented by one of his former pupils, Robert Lloyd of Aston in Shropshire, with the rectory of Selattyn, a living that was said to be worth £200 per annum.[13] Although parliament was not dissolved until September,

electioneering had already begun in earnest and Sacheverell indulged himself by making a triumphal progress to Selattyn. It is reported that his journeys there and back, which took him six weeks to complete and took in eight counties and twelve parliamentary boroughs, were like royal processions. He was accompanied from London to Uxbridge by a large party on horseback and was received with great honour at Oxford, Banbury, and Warwick, and at Shrewsbury he was met by the principal gentry of the county and some fifty thousand people who had gathered to witness his arrival. His journey northwards according to Monod[14] also took him via Coventry, Birmingham, Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme, but the Victorian History of Warwickshire states that although Tindal claims that Sacheverell may have passed through Birmingham on his way from Warwick to Shrewsbury, writers who describe in detail his reception in these two places do not mention his visiting Birmingham. At Lichfield he was greeted by the entire corporation in full regalia, including the city sheriff, Michael Johnson, father of Samuel. His return journey was no less spectacular, for when he reached Oxford he was escorted into the city by the sheriff of the county and a company of five hundred people, his arrival having been arranged to coincide with a visit of the judges in order, it was believed, to guarantee a large attendance. (Appendix 1)

Although Sacheverell was an obsessive man given to excessive vindictiveness in his writings, his cause was championed by a populace weary of the Whig directed war against France. For their part, the Whigs had totally misjudged both the outcome of the trial and the reaction of public feeling in favour of Sacheverell. They were severely humiliated by the trial and their loss of popularity led to Parliament being dissolved in September and in the following month the Tories, invoking the name of their martyr, swept to victory in the parliamentary elections of October 1710 with a majority of 151 in the Commons. It was generally recognised that their victory was largely due to the ill-judged impeachment of Sacheverell by the Whig ministry but, in truth, Sacheverell was an embarrassment to the Tories who loathed him and despised his aggrandisement.

As if to emphasise their support for the Anglican Church, when the Tories gained power they were able to pass legislation against Dissenters, who comprised a sizeable proportion of the Whig support, and this included the Occasional Conformity Act of 1711, which forbade Dissenters to circumvent the Test Acts by occasionally taking Anglican communion. The Tories also sought to end the expensive War of the Spanish Succession in an attempt to alleviate the government's financial position and entered into negotiations that were to take another two years.

By 1711, sympathy for the Jacobites was growing in Britain and the new Tory administration, who were deeply divided over who should succeed Anne, made secret contact in France with The Pretender, James Francis Edward Stuart, son of the deposed James II, to offer him the throne in succession to his half-sister Queen Anne if he would convert to Protestantism. However, James Stuart, like his father, was obstinate and refused to accept the crown on this basis and effectively terminated his chances of ever becoming king. This move by the Tories created hostile suspicion within the House of Hanover and was a prime cause of their demise during the reign of the Georges.

The Treaty of Utrecht was finally signed between March 31 and April 11, 1713 by the representatives of France, Great Britain, and the Netherlands to end Britain's involvement with the Netherlands in their fight against France. King Philip V of Spain ceded Gibraltar and Minorca to Great Britain while Louis XIV of France recognised Queen Anne's title and promised to give no further support to the exiled Stuarts; the Pretender was expelled from France to Bar-le-Duc in the duchy of Lorraine. The Utrecht settlement marked Great Britain's emergence as a world power but it also alienated the Elector of Hanover, who was a staunch supporter of the Habsburg interests that had been compromised, from the Tory ministers who had concluded the Treaty[15].

Sacheverell enjoyed a brief resurgence of fame immediately on the expiry of his sentence in 1713 when he preached on Palm Sunday to a large congregation at St. Saviour's, Southwark, on the text *'Father forgive them for they know not what they do'* which his enemies thought blasphemous. He sold his sermon for £100 and it was published as *The Christian Triumph*, but it sold only half of the 30,000 copies printed. On April 13, 1713 he was instituted to the valuable rectory of St. Andrew's at Holborn by the new Tory ministry, who, although they despised the author of the sermons, dreaded his influence over the mob, and not without good reason. However, this living was not the high preferment he thought he deserved and was to prove the limit of his promotion; his life thereafter was somewhat of an anticlimax. His acceptance of this living vacated his fellowship at Magdalen. He was selected to preach the Restoration sermon before the House of Commons in St. Margaret's, Westminster on May 29, on *'False notions of liberty'*, and his sermon was printed by order. After this he was warmly received by the Tory October Club, but when he preached at St. Paul's at the invitation of the Corporation of the Sons of the Clergy he was hissed by the crowd[16]. Sacheverell's Rectorship at Southwark was somewhat turbulent as he appears to have had frequent squabbles with his parishioners.

The Queen's health gave cause for concern and the Tories were deeply divided over who should succeed Anne, divisions that were to become very public during the Queen's illness in 1713. The Tory party essentially comprised three elements: there were 'Hanoverian' Tories, 'Jacobite' Tories and Tories who simply did not know what to do. At the same time the Whigs were united behind the Hanover family.

On July 30, 1714 Queen Anne suffered two violent strokes, which left her able to say only yes or no, and she died two days later having remained steadfastly loyal to the Hanoverian succession. So at the time it had seemed that England and Scotland were likely to get another female ruler, but Sophia of Hanover had died on 8 June before she could inherit and the heir to the British Crown was now her son, the Elector of Hanover, Georg Ludwig. Although there were far more Hanoverian Tories than Jacobite Tories, the prospect of a Lutheran prince with continental possessions to defend did not warm the hearts of isolationist Anglican county gentlemen so the party was in total disarray compared to the total support the Whigs gave to the new king. Ironically when the Privy Council had met on 30 July 1714, the Tory members were fully supportive of the planned succession and did what they could to ensure a smooth transition after Mary's death. However, George distrusted the Tory party because several members were sympathetic towards the Pretender and he therefore sided with the Whigs, who overturned the Tories in the General Election of 1715, and it was to be another half-century before the Tory party regained power.

Upon the death of Anne the two principal claimants were both several hundred miles from London: Georg Ludwig in Hanover and The Pretender in Lorraine. George, as he now signed himself, landed at Greenwich on September 18 to spend his first night on English soil. He was crowned King at Westminster Abbey on October 20, 1714.

However, George I soon made himself unpopular; he was ridiculed by his subjects, and many of his contemporaries considered him unintelligent, mainly because of his poor command of the English language. Also, the treatment of his wife, Sophia, was not well received. The death of Anne and the triumph of the Whigs under the new king signalled the end of all hopes of preferment for High-Church clergymen, and many turned to Jacobitism, including Sacheverell. But he withdrew from the cause, his ambitions soon waning and he was to adopt a more domestic attitude in his future life.

Against this general background of social and political unrest, we find that within 18th century Birmingham, despite its Puritan and Nonconformist tradition, the Protestant Succession was by no means popular and when, in November 1714, several of the town's principal Whigs arranged a public celebration of the coronation of George I some hundreds of people attacked the houses of the Dissenters William Guest* and Thomas Gisburne, as well as that of John Murdock; the defenders were forced to open fire with shotguns and to use their swords. From this date onwards the ominous cry 'Damn King George, Sacheverell forever!' was frequently heard in the town[17].

Meanwhile, in nearby Sutton Coldfield the former nonconformity of the town, so pronounced in the early 1600s, had been completely reversed since the Civil Wars to Tory and Jacobite leanings by the time that John Riland became Rector in 1689, a position he held until his death in 1720. He was a High Churchman, a staunch Tory, and showed openly Jacobite sympathies. He is recorded as attending meetings at a Jacobite club in Coleshill at which toasts were drunk to the 'White Rose', the emblem of The Pretender. His opinions were in accord with those held both by the Sacheverells and several of the other local gentry, so the scene was set for the subsequent events in 1714[18].

The 13th century moated New Hall** in Sutton Coldfield had been purchased at the beginning of the 17th century by Henry Sacheverell, of Morley and Callow in Derbyshire, who on his death in 1620 bequeathed both Callow Manor, near Derby, and New Hall to his eldest natural son, Valens Sacheverell (1604 -), who passed both properties on to his son George Sacheverell (1632-1715). According to Miss Agnes Bracken[19], Valens Sacheverell, who had married Anne Devereux, probably the

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* William Guest was a maltster, owner of part of the Cherry Orchard (now Cherry Street) in Birmingham, and a shareholder of the Old Meeting House in that town.
Hutton Beale, C., (1882), *Memorials of the Old Meeting House and Burial Ground, Birmingham*, Birmingham, White and Pike, p. 31

** In the 12th century an important status symbol was an impressive moat encircling a hall or manor house. However, the old Sutton Manor House, which was situated at the top of the present Manor Hill, did not possess a moat. This difficulty was overcome by building a new manor house, or hall, with a moat to serve as a hunting lodge, and this was named simply 'New Hall'. The New Hall Estate lies about a mile to the south-east of Sutton Coldfield town centre. New Hall is now a hotel.
Lea, R., (2002), *The Story of Sutton Coldfield*, Stroud, Sutton Publishing Limited, p. 30

daughter of Sir George Devereux of Sheldon Hall***[20, 21], came to New Hall to reside. The registration of their children in Sutton Coldfield Parish Church commenced in 1628 with the birth of a daughter, Blanche. Valens and Anne had six children but only two survived, Anne who was born in 1629 and George who was born in 1632. Anne married Charles Chadwick who also settled in Sutton Coldfield where he acted as a magistrate. George Sacheverell was a Justice of the Peace in Sutton for many years[22] and inherited New Hall after the death of his father, but the date of Valens' death is uncertain. Fentiman speculates that it could have been around 1655-60. It is suspected that, after George married his first wife, Valens' widow, Anne, found the prospect of sharing New Hall with George's second wife unwelcome and so moved to a house in Sutton's High Street. From an acrimonious exchange of correspondence in 1665 with her neighbour, Samuel Stevenson, it would appear that both had been living in adjacent houses for some years[23].

In 1709 New Hall was occupied by George who was an enthusiastic Jacobite. Since September 1689 some of the square and lozenge-shaped lead-glass windows in the Great Chamber on the first floor, sometimes known as the Banqueting Hall, had Latin texts with the initials *GS* (George Sacheverell) engraved upon them with a diamond (Appendix 2). According to Riland Bedford, Dr. Henry Sacheverell spent the greater part of the three years during which he was suspended from preaching at New Hall[24] and some accounts say that he was imprisoned there but there is negligible evidence to support either story. Whether or not that was the case, it seems that in the Autumn of 1714 he was certainly resident at New Hall because on the Sunday before the coronation of George I, October 20, 1714, Henry preached at Sutton's Holy Trinity Parish Church in his usual manner to a congregation that reportedly included two hundred Birmingham Jacobites and the result was, in the words of the Rev. Riland Bedford, *"a scandalous riot and attack upon Dissenting places of worship in the town of Birmingham"*[25].Tindal, the historian, states that the consequences appeared a day or two after the sermon. Monod suggests in his essay on Samuel Johnson's Jacobite Journey[26] that Samuel's father, Michael Johnson, who was the city sheriff of Lichfield at this time, may have travelled to Sutton Coldfield to hear the Doctor speak, and he could have stayed at the home of his brother-in-law Nathaniel Ford, a clothier, who became warden of the corporation in 1709. However, the sacking of the New and Old Meeting chapels in Birmingham* did not occur until July of the following year so it cannot be true, as Hutton, Riland Bedford, and other historians imply, that Sacheverell's sermon at Sutton Coldfield excited the Jacobite mob in the congregation immediately to go on the rampage and damage and destroy Dissenting chapels in Birmingham. William Hutton, who had a tendency towards occasional historical inaccuracies, in this instance got his facts wrong and some later writers have unfortunately based their information on Hutton's erroneous account. The Victoria History of Warwickshire brings some sense to this muddle by stating that the

*** Sheldon Hall is situated between the districts of Tile Cross and Kingshurst in Birmingham. The central section of a 16th century timber-frame was replaced by a brick building but the original roof rafters were retained. These have been dendro-dated to 1616. Some years ago the Hall was converted into a restaurant.
Leather, P., (2002), *A Guide to the Buildings of Birmingham*, Stroud, Tempus Publishing Limited, p. 43

* The two related Birmingham Nonconformist chapels were the Old Meeting, which was erected in 1689 and stood in Philip Street, afterwards called New Row and finally Old Meeting Street, and the New Meeting, which was built in 1692 at Deritend alongside the River Rea. This latter Meeting removed to a new building in 1732 in New Meeting Street adjoining Moor Street.
Billingham, R., (2008 Ed.), *Aspects of Priestley's Life in Birmingham, 1780-91*, Private Pub., pp. 3-4

Fig. 3
The NE-facing bay windows of the Great Chamber at New Hall, Sutton Coldfield, which contain some of the panes of glass etched by George Sacheverell in 1689.

Fig. 4
An example of some of the etchings in the windows of the Great Chamber at New Hall

disturbances in Birmingham following Sacheverell's sermon amounted only to the breaking up of the Whig party held to celebrate George I's coronation, referred to previously[27] It is difficult to believe that enthusiasm for the Church of England, though presumably sufficient to provide plausible justification, was great enough to set off these riots, or that doctrinal differences were more than an excuse for disturbance, and the distortion in Hutton's account of the events of 1714 and 1715 in Birmingham undermines its reliability.

Birmingham continued to experience unrest caused by the Protestant Succession and it was the threat of a Jacobite invasion in 1715 that precipitated a general outburst of mob violence in the Midlands and alarm was felt for the security of Birmingham, *'a town which by reason of its manufacturing of firearms was capable of furnishing vast quantities'.* In April 1715 justices had to be brought in from Solihull to *'still the mob there'*. In the event riots began at West Bromwich in July and spread to Birmingham by the 16th when the furniture and fittings of the Lower Meeting House in Deritend were destroyed by the mob. They were persuaded by the owner to save the walls on the understanding that the chapel would only be used as a dwelling-house in future, but the promise was not kept; the chapel was repaired and used for worship again. However, on the following day the mob returned to attack the Upper (or Old) Meeting House and destroyed nearly the whole of the building and contents by fire. Gisburne's home was again attacked. Chapels in the West Midlands were also attacked including those at West Bromwich, Oldbury, Dudley, Cradley, Bilston and Kingswood*. The justices and constables were powerless before the mob and in order to restore order the Warwickshire justices called out the *posse comitatus*, but the force of about one thousand men, which the constables managed to turn out, proved to be itself *'tumultuous and mutinous…being made up chiefly of mercenary rabble'*, so it was not until July 26 that the High Sheriff, accompanied by some mounted gentlemen and sixty horse *'of the late militia'* arrived in Birmingham and put a stop to the riots[28].

At this period other areas of the Midlands experienced what amounted to a local insurrection, taking the form of religious riots. Dissenting chapels throughout Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire were destroyed by mobs of metalworkers, small tradesmen and artisans. Monod suggests that these attacks were encouraged, if not fomented, by local gentlemen and manufacturers citing the example of the Nonconformist chapel at Lichfield that was burned down on the night of July 17 and 18, 1715. As a consequence, a worried city magistracy assembled on the August 20 to send a loyal address to King George[29].

The inadequacy of the manorial administration, even when supported by the justices, in the face of these repeated disorders persuaded the loyalist Birmingham merchants in 1715 to petition for a charter of incorporation *'to support their trade, the king's interest, and destroy the villainous attempts of the Jacobites'*, but the petition met with opposition from Sir John Bridgman of Castle Bromwich Hall and was unsuccessful[30]. It was 1838 before Birmingham gained its charter of incorporation.

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* Kingswood Chapel was built in 1708 in Dark Lane, Hollywood, probably by a group of Birmingham Dissenters who wished to worship in what was considered to be a safer locality. In 1715, after the Sacheverell Riots, when it was destroyed by fire, it was rebuilt on a different site in Packhorse Lane, Hollywood, but was again destroyed during the Priestley Riots of 1791. The Packhorse Lane Chapel still exists and is open for worship. [http://www.kingswoodwarwickunitarians.moonfruit.com – accessed 14/09/2008]

THE MEETING HOUSES IN BIRMINGHAM DAMAGED OR DESTROYED IN THE SACHEVERELL RIOTS OF 1715

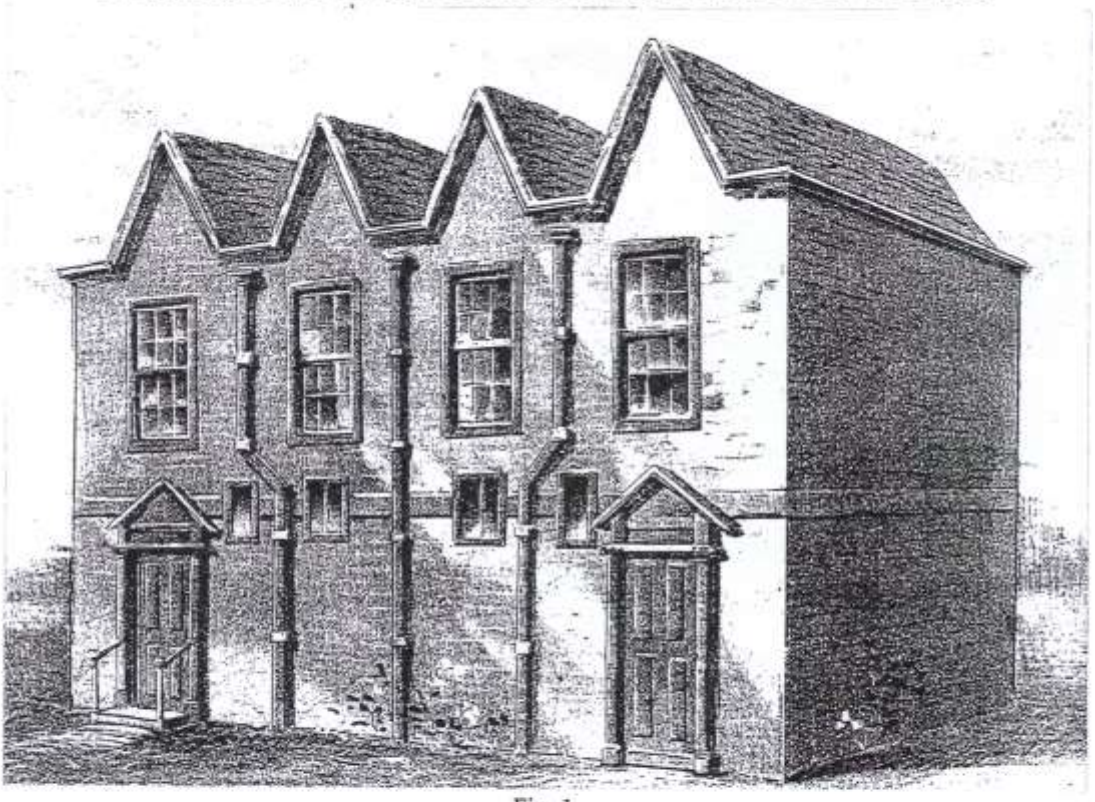

Fig. 1

THE OLD (or Upper) MEETING HOUSE, built in 1689, destroyed in the riots of 1715 and later rebuilt.

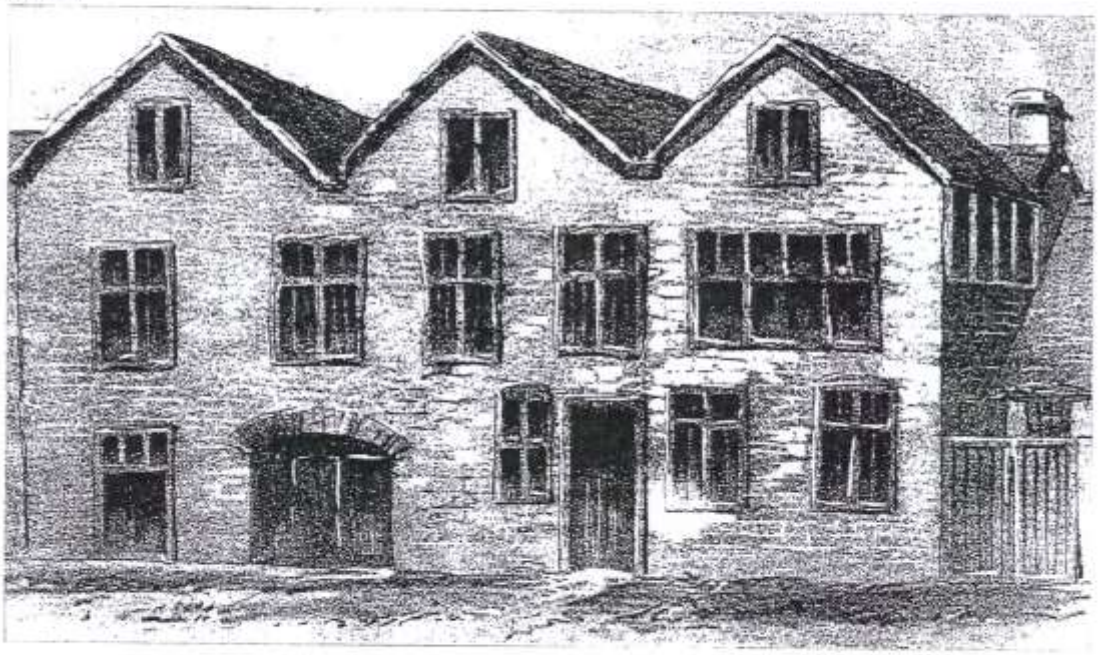

Fig. 2

THE LOWER (or New) MEETING HOUSE, DERITEND, built in 1692 as an overflow chapel for The Old Meeting House. It was partially damaged in the riots of 1715. Due to flood problems caused by the River Rea, a new chapel was built by Moor Street in 1732. This drawing shows the chapel as it appeared when converted to a workshop.

As previously mentioned, Hutton and earlier writers attributed the disturbance in 1714 to the influence of Dr. Sacheverell's preaching at Sutton Coldfield and later writers have cited Sacheverell as a provocation to the rioting which took place in the following year. Many historians now believe that Dr. Sacheverell was not the instigator of these troubles but used the prevailing social unrest to fan the flames of his cause, thus the riots dating from his trial in 1710 to the 1715 disturbances bear his name. The targets of the rioters were selected ones with hostility directed against Dissenters. Serious disturbances occurred across the country when Sacheverell was far distant so he could not readily be made accountable for these. Perhaps these riots should more aptly have been called the Jacobite Riots but, rightly or wrongly, the maverick's name will forever be linked with them.

In 1712 George Sacheverell acknowledged his rather dubious relationship to Dr. Henry Sacheverell, by bequeathing him a moiety (a half) of the manor of Callow which he inherited on George's death. This was in testimony of his regard for the violent sermon that the celebrated Tory divine had preached as an assize sermon at Derby in 1709. The other half of the manor of Callow was given to his nephew, Charles Chadwick. When George died without issue on May 18, 1715 in his 83rd year, in a complicated will dated May 5, 1815, he bequeathed his valuable estate at Callow to Henry, while he left the New Hall estate at Sutton Coldfield to his second wife Mary (née Wilson) for the rest of her life, to be passed on after her death to his great-nephew, Charles Chadwick (1705-79), who, as a condition of George's will, was to take the name of Sacheverell within 12 months following his 21st birthday. This he did rather reluctantly, calling himself Sacheverell Chadwick, and it appears that he did not take up residence at New Hall until 1729 when he took out a mortgage for £1,040 with Francis Horton of Wolverhampton[31], presumably in preparation for his eventual marriage to Anna Maria Brearly.

On June 6, 1715 at the Parish Church of St. Nicholas and St. Peter ad Vincula (St. Peter in Chains)*, Curdworth, just 3 miles to the south-east of New Hall, Henry married his benefactor's widow, Mary Sacheverell[32], who was about fourteen years his senior, thus becoming a very wealthy man and he rather faded from the limelight after this. In 1720 he acquired a house at Grove, Highgate, where he died on June 5, 1724 from *'a complication of disorders'* brought about when he slipped on the doorstep in January 1723, braking two ribs. On June 11 he was laid to rest in the chancel of St. Andrew's, Holborn, where there is an inscription to his memory. His widow married Charles Chambers in 1735 and died, aged 75, on September 6, 1739.
Riland Bedford perhaps summed up Sacheverell's rebellious career best when he said that after 1715 *"the Government wisely took no more notice of Sacheverell's violence, …and like many a popular idol, before and since, was altogether forgotten when the generation of his admirers had given way to a new one"*[33].

Roy Billingham
October 2008

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* In the churchyard of the Parish Church of Curdworth lie buried the remains of Cornelius and Anne Ford who lived at nearby Dunton Hall in the 17th century. Their daughter, Sarah, was the *'dear honoured mother'* of the famous Dr. Samuel Johnson. In 1706, a 50 year old bookseller, Michael Johnson of Lichfield and his bride of 37, Sarah Ford, married at St. Giles's Church, Baddesley Clinton. Sarah's brother, Nathaniel Ford, was a clothier in Sutton Coldfield and was Warden in 1709.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Dr. Sacheverell's 'Progress' to Selattyn

The historical information relating to Dr. Sacheverell's 'progress' in his journey to Selattyn tends to limit itself to local interests and so an attempt has been made to gather as much relevant information, some of it contradictory, in order to reconstruct as near as possible both his outward route to Selattyn and his return route.

Sacheverell was alleged by both his opponents and, after the excitement of the trial had passed, his friends, who were slow to deny it, to be an insolent and hot-headed man without learning, literary ability, or real piety, distinguished chiefly by his striking person and good delivery, and by his scurrilous abuse of Dissenters and Whigs.

Having recently endured the indignities of an extremely high profile trial for impeachment in the highest court of the land in front of the queen, her lords and parliament, and been found guilty, he made full use of the swell of public acclaim following the news of his light punishment and he gloried in the adulation bestowed upon him wherever he went. This news set off riots against Nonconformists throughout the country that became known as the Sacheverell Riots. This was an age of social unrest throughout Europe and the British royal succession contributed to political and religious unrest at home for several years; Sacheverell's name attached to many of these local skirmishes many of which he had had no part in and perhaps did not deserve the consequent stigma that attached to his name.

While his trial was in progress, Sacheverell was presented with the living of Selattyn in Shropshire by a former pupil of his at Oxford, Robert Lloyd II, a son of a former Shropshire member of parliament.

Choosing the summer months as an ideal time to tackle the appalling state of the British road system, he set out from London in June 1710 to be installed as rector of Selattyn, near Oswestry, and to use the journey as an opportunity for electioneering on behalf of the High-Church Tories in the anticipated general election which was held later in that year, and no doubt to promote his own name in the hope that he might be favoured with promotion within the Church of England when a predicted Tory administration replaced the current Whig one. The Dictionary of National Biography gives the date of the start of his journey as the June 15[34] but Steele in a contemporary account gives the date as June 10[35] which would seem to me more credible because Monod states that Sacheverell arrived at Lichfield on the June16[36]. This would have been utterly impossible had he set out from London on the previous day but quite achievable if he had set out five days earlier.

The term 'progress' presents a picture of an entourage on horseback gently travelling from location to location. In general, horses had to be rested, watered and fed every ten miles or so and if Sacheverell's entourage was large they would have walked and trotted their horses at a leisurely pace.

The Doctor's 'progress' was made the occasion of extravagant demonstrations by his partisans and a large party on horseback accompanied him on the first stage of his

journey to Uxbridge. From there he proceeded to Oxford where he stayed some time to be received with great honour, magnificently entertained by the Earl of Abingdon, the Vice-Chancellor of the University and the heads of the colleges.

At Banbury he was greeted by the Mayor, Recorder and Aldermen in their full robes with the mace being carried before them. They presented him with wine and congratulated him on his deliverance.

At Warwick hundreds of inhabitants on horseback escorted him into the town while the church bells were rung in his honour. The church steeple and major buildings were draped in flags and the streets hung with flowers.

Wherever he went his approach was greeted by drums beating and trumpets sounding and crowds of his admirers wearing the oak leaf that had become a popular symbol since the Restoration. Although he was forbidden to preach, the churches on his route were overcrowded with people clamouring to hear him read the prayers and, where he presided at services, parents brought their infants to the fonts for his blessing[37].

Monod claims that from Warwick the Doctor progressed to Coventry, Birmingham, Stafford, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Shrewsbury and other towns, ending up at Worcester. There would appear to be differing views as to whether Sacheverell visited Birmingham during his journey and I have been unable to find any evidence that this was the case. Dent in his *Old and New Birmingham* quotes Hutton fleetingly as claiming that the Doctor made a triumphal progress through the town but the dates are wrong and I am inclined to believe that this was more than likely 'hearsay' on the part of Hutton. Although Tindal also claims that Sacheverell *may* have passed through Birmingham on his way from Warwick to Shrewsbury, writers who describe in detail his reception in these two places do not mention his visiting Birmingham. Had he done so then he would almost certainly have passed through Sutton Coldfield on his way to Lichfield and I have been unable to find any evidence to support this. It is conceivable that from Coventry he travelled via Coleshill where there was High Church, Tory and Jacobite support in the shape of the rector of Coleshill, John Kettlewell, who was a Nonjuror* and an active member of a Jacobite club in that town (see page 9). It is also tempting to conjecture that on his way to Lichfield he stayed at nearby New Hall at Sutton Coldfield as a guest of his 'cousin', George Sacheverell.

We know from Monod that on June 16 he reached Lichfield where he was greeted by the city sheriff and the entire corporation in full regalia. The wife of Michael Johnson, the city sheriff, had only nine months before given birth to a son named Samuel. Monod speculates that Michael might possibly have carried his son to the reception, which may account for the confusing story retold later by Boswell in which Samuel is wrongly described as a three-year old at the time[38]. Boswell in his *Life of Johnson* confirms that *'Sacheverell, indeed, made a triumphal progress through the midland counties in 1710; and it appears by the books of corporation of Lichfield that he was received in that town, and complimented by the attendance of the corporation, "and a present of three dozen of wine" on June 16, 1710'*[39]. If Sacheverell and his party

* Nonjuror: any of a group of clergy in England and Wales who declined to take the oath of allegiance to William and Mary in 1689.

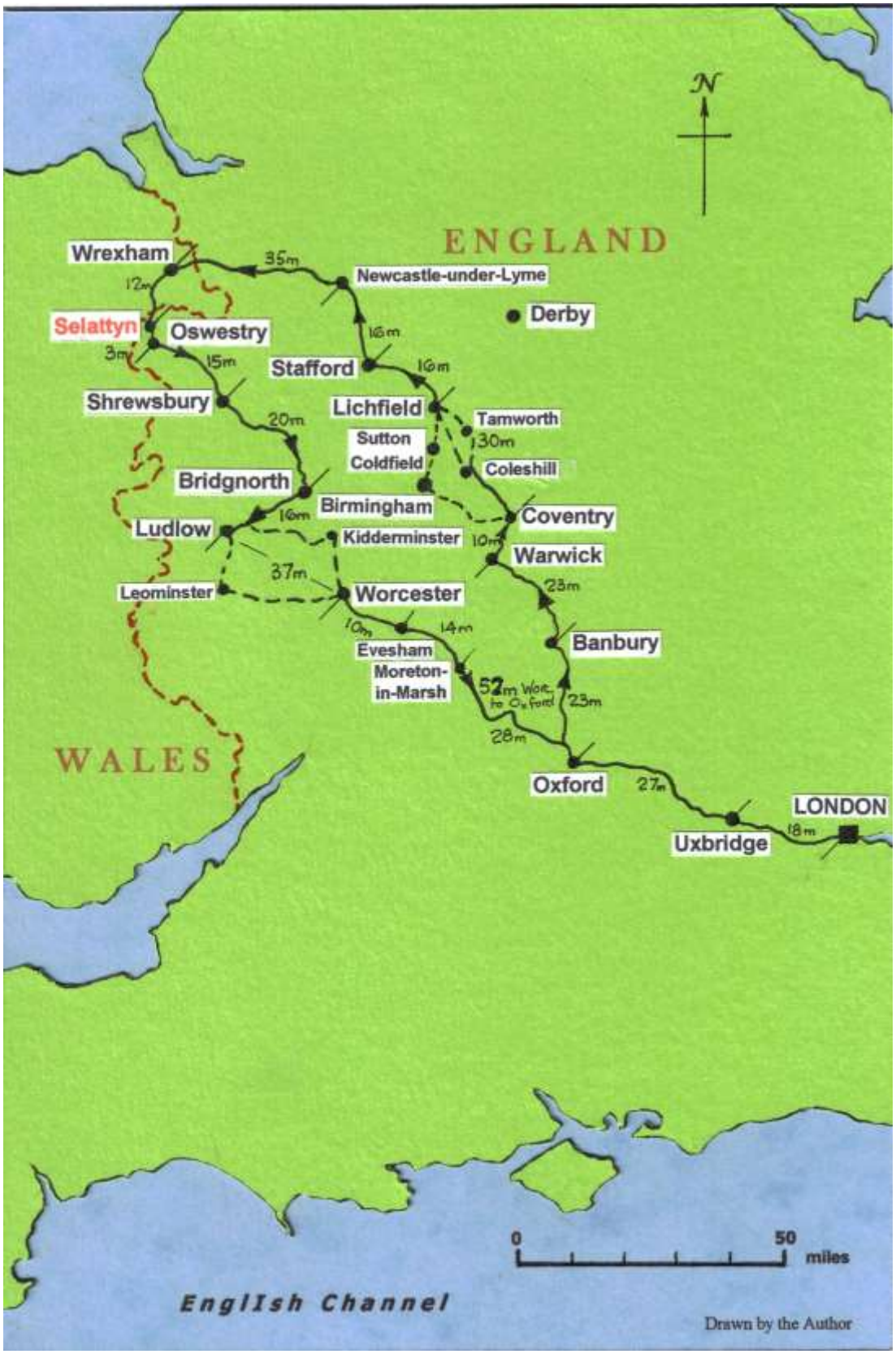

Fig. 5
A map showing the probable routes taken by Dr. Henry Sacheverell in June and July, 1710, during his ‘progress’ to Selattyn in order to be installed as rector, and on his return to London.

stayed overnight in Lichfield, it is interesting to speculate if they stayed at *The Swan*, in Bird Street, where the Tories traditionally met. At this time *The Swan* would probably have been a galleried coaching inn before it was rebuilt in its present form later in the 18th century. *The Swan's* major competitor was *The George*, also in Bird Street, which by tradition was where the local Whigs met, so one can hardly see a hearty welcome here for Sacheverell and his party[40].

Sacheverell continued his northward journey by way of Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme from where it would appear he travelled to Wrexham, probably via Nantwich.

Following the Glorious Revolution in 1689 Denbighshire had become notorious for Toryism and even Jacobitism amongst both the lower and upper layers of society.

Wrexham had a reputation for being divided and contentious and as the news of the outcome of Sacheverell's trial spread into the provinces, so did the riots. They began in Wrexham within a week: on Friday, March 24, *'a great rabble of this town got together to rejoice as they said for the mild sentence against Dr. Sacheverell'*, in the words of the Whig chief justice of Chester, Sir Joseph Jekyll. Rioters were numbered in their hundreds.

Over the next three months the temper of the town quietened but the inhabitants demonstrated their sympathies once again during July when Sacheverell passed through on his triumphant 'progress' through England and Wales to his new living at Selattyn, a few miles away over the English border. They decorated the streets with flowers and their houses with boughs, bonfires were lit and effigies burnt, while women queued up to kiss the eligible bachelor. The town's enthusiasm slightly alarmed even Sacheverell's entourage[41].

Sacheverell was installed as rector of Selattyn in July. He began his return journey with a civic reception at Oswestry, and having been hailed there by what one bishop called in disgust, *'a ridiculous assembly of the clergy'*, went on to Shrewsbury, where he was welcomed by a host of some 7,000 supporters. This estimate of numbers seems far more reasonable than the figure of 50,000 frequently quoted by some writers, including Steele writing in 1713.

From Shrewsbury he travelled the twenty miles down the Severn Valley to Bridgnorth and then detoured south-westwards to Ludlow passing through each of these towns with great pomp, and accepted hospitality from several parliamentary candidates, though not from either of the Tory candidates for the county itself.[42] However, in Bridgnorth some Whigs baited him by carrying *'oranges on sticks'*, assuring his supporters that *'it was the best fruit that ever came to England'*[43].

The Doctor then proceeded towards Worcester where Wylde, a Low Church Tory, was instrumental in dampening down the celebrations planned for his visit. Today we might travel via Leominster before turning eastwards to Bromyard and Worcester. However, in 1710 Sacheverell might have chosen to go via Cleobury Mortimer, Bewdley, Kidderminster to follow the Severn Valley southwards to Worcester.

Certainly this was the route taken by William Hutton and his family in 1787 when they journeyed in the opposite direction to Aberystwyth. We know from a letter written by Thomas Foley to Robert Harley on July 17, 1710 that Dr. Sacheverell had paid a recent visit to Cotheridge, a village four miles west of Worcester, at the invitation of the lord of the manor, Mr. Barkley Green, who happened also to be the sheriff of Worcestershire in 1710[44]. On his journey from Ludlow, it is possible that the Doctor visited and maybe stayed with Mr. Green at Cotheridge Court, which is just off the Bromyard to Worcester Road. However, I can find no record of him attending a service at St. Leonard's parish church in Cotheridge.

From Worcester Sacheverell is likely to have travelled via Evesham, Moreton-in-Marsh and Chipping Norton back to Oxford where he was escorted into the town on July 20 by local dignitaries and a crowd of 500 people. This display was apparently arranged to coincide with a visit to Oxford of Sacheverell's judges[45].

By the time that Dr. Sacheverell had returned to his home in London he had completed a four hundred miles round-journey that had taken a full six weeks and in which he had reportedly travelled through eight counties and twelve parliamentary boroughs. Numerous individual reports all testify to the triumphal manner of his procession and the receptions he had received at towns and cities en route. Only at Worcester did his reception appear somewhat muted by comparison.

Appendix 2 – The Window Etchings at New Hall

The Great Chamber at New Hall was originally constructed about 1542 by Thomas Gibbons but was enlarged and decorated by Henry Sacheverell towards the end of the 16th century when he added the bay windows that still retain their original glass.

On the back wall of the Great Chamber hangs a framed translation of some of the Latin texts etched by George Sacheverell (1632-1715) upon the front and side windows of the room in September 1689. The translations are reproduced below. but the reference to the 15th-16th century is clearly an error and should, of course, be the 17th-18th century.

Latin Diamond Writing

Latin inscriptions, dated 1689, taken from the windows of the Great Chamber, New Hall.

Malo me fortuna peniteat quam Victoria pudeat. I prefer that I regret my fortune than be ashamed of my victory.

Si nocco quod ames fateor sine fuk noceb o.
If I do harm because I love I confess I will be doing harm without end.

Taces fero spero. You are silent and I bear it and hope.

Quae fecisse iuvat facta reffere pudet.
What (you) enjoyed doing (you) are ashamed to talk about.

O si fata meas paterentur vitam ducere auspiciis. Oh, if only the fates were allowing my women-folk to live their life with (good) omens.

Res non semper spes mihi semper adest.
I do not always have property (but) hope is always with me.

Felicitas si arrisit non irrisit. If luck has smiled, it has not mocked.

Quod crimen dicis praeter amare meum.
What do you call my crime but loving?

Nulla placet quam…. No girl pleases whom….

Diamond Writings by George Sacheverell, resident at New Hall 15th-16th century

Translated by Ugles Walker — Scripsit Elizabeth Marvin

There is an unsubstantiated story that George Sacheverell fell in love with his sister and was severely punished by being locked in the Great Chamber at New Hall for several months in order to cure him of his love lust. Having plenty of time for contemplation during his imprisonment in the room, so the story goes, he wrote short epigraphs in Latin on the windows and these still exist (see Fig. 4) Most of them are about love and loss, even raising some questions as to who was the pursuer and the pursued[46]. Certainly two appear to refer to a love affair:

Oct 20	Oct 29
QUAE FECISSE IUVAT	QUOD CRIMEN DICIS
FACTA REFERRE PUDET	PRAETER AMARE MEUM
What (you) enjoyed doing	*G. Sacheverell*
(you) are ashamed to talk about	What do you call my crime but loving?

This story seems rather unlikely given that at this time George Sacheverell would have been about 57 years of age. Why would he have been locked in the Great Chamber and on whose authority, given that he owned New Hall. Also, why should he so obsessively have etched these Latin epigraphs. Maybe he suffered some sort of mental breakdown that forced his relations to forcibly confine him for his own protection. His sister's husband, Charles Chadwick, was a local magistrate so he could have authorised George's confinement. Certainly, George seemed to be gullible enough to be convinced by Henry Sacheverell's claim that he was a kinsman to the extent that he bequeathed to Henry a moiety of his estate at Callow.

If this story of love is true, it would help to explain why he etched so many inscriptions in this particular room. However, the history of the Sacheverell family is somewhat incomplete and there exist a few conflicting statements which require caution on the part of the local historian. For instance, Riland Bedford in his book *Three Hundred Years of a Family Living* claims that Dr. Sacheverell spent the greater part of the years during which he was suspended from preaching at New Hall[47]. This statement might be true but does not appear to have any supportive evidence and is probably the basis for Marvin's similar assertion in 1988. Marvin also alludes to stories of witchcraft associated with several members of the Sacheverell family[48]. One of them was definitely an alchemist as verses written at the time show. One verse suggests that the alchemist was George, as he was the Sacheverell with no heir.

"Sullen Sacheverell, last of thy race,
Of New Hall's fair lands to be master,
Leave magic and alchemy, fly from this place,
Thou art warned of impending disaster."[49]

What we do know is that his older sister, Anne (1629–89), married Charles Chadwick (1637-97) in 1665 and they came to live in High Street, Sutton Coldfield*, at the time of her mother's (Anne Sacheverell, née Devereux) death.

Sometime after the death in the 1660s of her husband, Valens Sacheverell, and after a disagreement with Mary (née Wilson), her new daughter-in-law, Anne Sacheverell moved from New Hall into the family-owned house at No. 36 High Street, Sutton Coldfield, a three storey stone building that was given, like most of the buildings in the street, a smart Georgian makeover in the early 18th century. She was a very imperious lady very much aware of her social status When she died in June 1688 she was found to have £2,000 in cash in her room, worth over £1,000,000 in today's money.

Anne Chadwick died on September 23, 1689. She is buried at Mavesyn Ridware[50], near Rugeley in Staffordshire, where the Chadwicks held land. The month and year of her death coincides with the period of a lot of the etchings so could this have been the catalyst for George to have executed these inscriptions so purposefully?

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SCRef.L = Sutton Coldfield Reference Library

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12. Stephen & Lee, op. cit., p. 571
13. Ibid. p. 571
14. Monod, P., op.cit. p.16
15. Gregg, E., op. cit. pp. 361-2

*Fentiman states that in 1618 Henry Sacheverell and his son, Valens, bought a house in Sutton Coldfield for purposes unknown but possibly to keep an eye on New Hall whilst Ursula Gibbons was still in residence. He claims that it is argued elsewhere that this house is the present No. 36 High Street, known as Cull's House since the late 19th century when it was occupied by the widow of John Cull a schoolmaster, a Mrs. Ann Cull, her son, two schoolmistress daughters, a pupil teacher, one scholar and two domestic servants. The house was possibly built as two stone houses in the late 16th or early 17th century but was much altered in the late 1700s. It has five bays on three floors with a parapet and has Grade 2 listing protection. Fentiman poses the question of whether the brick facing and stone enhancements were an attempt to raise the status of the house for the sake of a prestigious Mrs. Sacheverell or are the work of a later date.

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