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THE RISE OF A GENTRY FAMILY
THE SMYTHS OF ASHTON COURT

c. 1500 — 1642

by J. H. BETTEY

PUBLISHED BY THE BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL
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BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
LOCAL HISTORY PAMPHLETS

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The next pamphlet in the series will be by Miss Kathleen Barker and will examine the Victorian Music Hall in Bristol.

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THE SMYTHS OF ASHTON COURT c.1500-1642

by

J. H. BETTEY

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For four centuries the Smyth family of Ashton Court was a major force in the economic and social life of Bristol and north Somerset. From their fine house, set in its impressive, walled deer-park over-looking Bristol, the family dominated the surrounding area. As landowners, members of Parliament, justices of the peace, distributors of charity and as major employers of labour, they were recognised leaders of local society; they were connected by marriage with several other leading county families, and their great house at Ashton Court was a fitting symbol of their power and influence. The Smyths employed a small army of servants in the house and grounds and their estates included lands and property in Bristol, north Somerset and south Gloucestershire, as well as mines and colliery rights in Bedminster and Ashton Vale. The family's rise to great wealth began in the sixteenth century and their power lasted until the end of the nineteenth century. During the twentieth century the twin problems of heavy death duties and lack of male heirs gradually brought the Smyth empire to an end. The last male head of the family to live at Ashton Court was Sir Greville Smyth, who died in 1901. He maintained all the style and lavish expenditure of the past, and his wife Dame Emily Smyth, who died in 1914, is still remembered locally as the gracious lady of the manor. Her daughter by a former marriage subsequently took the name Smyth and was known as the Hon. Esmé; she lived at Ashton Court until her death in 1946, a benevolent person, much loved in the neighbourhood. When she died, the contents of the house were sold, and in 1959 the house and the grounds were acquired by Bristol Corporation.

The following account tells the story of the rise of the family from obscure beginnings in the fifteenth century to the position of great wealth and influence which they had achieved by the mid-seventeenth century, and shows the way in which the foundations of the family prosperity were laid. This is based on the fine collection of family papers — letters, deeds and leases, manorial, estate and household accounts, etc. — which are preserved in the Bristol Record Office. During the early period of their history with which this pamphlet is concerned, the family name was spelt in

a variety of ways—Smith, Smithe, Smyth, Smythe; later members of the family preferred 'Smyth'.

The rise of the Smyth family during the sixteenth century from comparatively humble beginnings as minor tradesmen and merchants in Bristol to substantial Somerset landowners, playing their part in national and even in international affairs, illustrates the speed with which such 'new' gentry families could rise and become assimilated into county society. The Smyths' rapid climb to great wealth and landed status also provides a fascinating contrast between the character of the hard-working, money-making, merchant members of the family and the educated, leisured landowners who succeeded them. Few successful English mercantile families of the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries lasted for more than two or three generations, for as soon as they had achieved a comfortable fortune it was invested in land, and the family adopted a completely different life-style as country gentry. The Smyths were no exception to this.

The family came originally from Aylburton, near Lydney in the Forest of Dean, and continued to own lands in that area until the early sixteenth century.¹ In the late fifteenth century the two brothers Matthew and Thomas Smyth moved to Bristol where they worked as 'hoopers' or makers of bonds for casks and barrels. They also engaged in trade, dealing in cloth which was sent to Ireland, and importing wine and small quantities of fish.² Both prospered in Bristol. By the time of his death in 1542, Thomas had acquired land outside the city at Shirehampton as well as various tenements within the city of Bristol itself. But he continued to regard himself as primarily a tradesman and in his will described himself as a hooper. The bulk of his property he left to his son, John, who was described as 'the Shewmaker'.³ It was the elder brother Matthew Smyth who really began to lay the foundations of the family fortune. Soon after his arrival in Bristol in the late fifteenth century he married Alice the daughter and heiress of a Bristol merchant Lewis John, acquired through his marriage a house in Corn Street, and during the early sixteenth century began to flourish as a merchant. He had apprentices of his own, and by the time of the Lay Subsidy of 1524 he was listed among the merchant class and assessed at £16. In his will of 1526 he proudly described himself as 'Matthew Smythe of

Bristowe Merchant'.⁴ A measure of Matthew's success is to be seen in the fact that his daughter, Elizabeth, was married to Thomas Phelips, son of Richard Phelips M.P. for Melcombe Regis in Dorset. By this marriage the family took their first steps into the sphere of the country gentry, for the Phelips were rising rapidly in wealth and influence. The youngest son of Thomas Phelips and his wife Elizabeth was Sir Edward Phelips, a prominent lawyer, Speaker of the House of Commons in 1604, Master of the Rolls in 1611, and the builder of Montacute House.⁵

The surviving documents tell us little about the character of Matthew Smyth. In his will, dated August 1526, he left the usual small bequests to the church, including eleven shillings to his parish church of St. Leonard's in Bristol; to his son John he left some land in the Forest of Dean, 'and God's blessing and mine'; while the rest of his goods he left to his wife Alice. It seems likely that Alice was an important influence upon her husband's successful career as a merchant, for she was evidently an enterprising, hard-working person, and continued to trade on her own account after Matthew's death. The ledger kept by her son, John Smyth, covering the years 1538-1550, lists occasional items exported or imported on her behalf, including cloth which was sent to Spain and imports of wine, oil, iron and woad. An inventory of the goods of Alice Smyth made soon after her death in April 1546 also reflects her trading activities for it includes the large sum of £173 in ready money, £100 in debts owing to her, cloth worth £14, and wool and yarn ('wull dyed and undyed that she left . . . and yern').⁶ The impression that remains of Matthew and Alice Smyth, however imperfect and piecemeal, is of a hard-working couple, who were successful in their trading ventures through careful attention to their own affairs, and who played little part in community life or civic affairs.

It was the only surviving son of Matthew and Alice Smyth, John Smyth, who was to achieve outstanding success as a merchant, and who acquired sufficient wealth to be able to purchase lands in several places around Bristol, including the house and estate at Ashton Court. John Smyth's common name makes it impossible to trace his early life with complete certainty, for there is no way of distinguishing between the multitude of John Smyths whose names appear in the records. He obviously followed in his father's footsteps as a merchant, and he may have been the

1. L.U. Way, 'The Smyths of Ashton Court', *Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society Transactions*, vol xxxi, 1908, p.244. J. Vanes (ed.), *The Ledger of John Smythe 1538-1550*, Bristol Record Society, vol xxviii, 1975, Introduction pp. 1-2 and Genealogical table p.319.

2. J. Vanes, *op. cit.* p.2. Much of the information about the early history of the family is based on Dr. Vanes' research.

3. Bristol Record Office 36074/60: Will of Thomas Smyth, 1542.

4. B.R.O. AC/F7/1: Will of Matthew Smyth, 1526. A transcript of this will is given in L.U. Way, *op. cit.*, p.244; this contains the last reference to the family lands in the Forest of Dean.

5. *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol xv, p.1029. This wrongly gives Elizabeth as the daughter of John Smyth instead of Matthew; she was John Smyth's sister.

6. J. Vanes, *op. cit.* p.2; B.R.O. 00566/12. The inventory of the goods of Alice Smyth is given in *The Ledger of John Smythe*, (ed. J. Vanes), p.273.

Johannes Smyth de Bristoll, Marchaunt' who was admitted to the Bristol Staple Court in 1513. There is also considerable uncertainty about John Smyth's marriage, for we know little of his wife except that her name was Joan. It is probable, though the surviving records make it impossible to be certain, that John Smyth set his feet on the road to fortune by marrying a wealthy young widow, and that his wife was the daughter of Thomas Hoper, a merchant of Bridgwater, and that she was the widow of one of the wealthiest of the Bridgwater merchants, Simon White, who died in 1529. Certainly in 1538 John Smyth paid £2 6s. 8d. to Sir Thomas Crane, priest, for saying masses for the soul of Thomas Hoper of Bridgwater. It may have been the money he acquired through marriage to a rich widow that enabled John Smyth to establish himself as a Bristol merchant living in the house in Corn Street where his first son, Hugh, was born in 1530.⁷

From this point onwards, however, it is possible to gain a much clearer picture of John Smyth's career, and of his character and business activities, for his ledger or account book survives for the years 1538-1550, and he also played a prominent part in the affairs of Bristol.⁸ In 1532-33 John Smyth became one of the two Bristol sheriffs for the year. This was a time-consuming and expensive office, often held by recently elected councillors, and it is probable that Smyth had become a member of the Common Council of Bristol soon after 1530. His year of office was particularly difficult, for it witnessed a vociferous controversy between various preachers in Bristol over the early Reformation changes. This 'battle of the pulpits' between advocates of the new religious ideas and supporters of the old ways, created a great deal of 'infamy, discord, strife and debate' in Bristol which inevitably involved the sheriffs.⁹ John Smyth was also concerned with the purchase by the Corporation of various lands and properties in Bristol. In 1544, for example, he lent £20 to the city 'in lone for to help pay to the Kyng for the landes that the Lord Lisle had in Bristowe and thereabowt . . .'.¹⁰ During the next few years he was also active in helping to arrange for the purchase of former monastic lands by the city. In 1547, the year of the dissolution of the chantries, John Smyth became Mayor of Bristol and was involved in the purchase of former chantry lands and property by

7. This conclusion is based on the research of Dr. Jean Vanes, but note that Collinson, who as incumbent of Long Ashton knew later members of the family well, says that John Smyth married Joan, the daughter of John Parr, Esq. It has not so far been possible to trace any other mention of this family; see J. Collinson, *History of Somerset*, 1791, vol ii, p.292.

8. J. Vanes (ed.), *The Ledger of John Smythe 1538-1550*, Bristol Record Society, vol xxviii, 1975. See also Dr. Vanes' Introduction, pp. 22-24.

9. *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, vol vi, p.799; vol xii (1), pp. 508, 1147.

10. J. Vanes, *op. cit.* p.110.

the Corporation, including the chapel on Bristol bridge. He served a second term as Mayor in 1554-55.¹¹

The picture which emerges of John Smyth from his ledger and from the other surviving sources is of an able, hard-working and public-spirited man. His business as a merchant grew rapidly and was extremely profitable. He traded in woollen cloth which he obtained from weavers in Somerset and Wiltshire and sent to France and Spain; he also exported leather which came from the Forest of Dean and Wales, lead from the Mendips and wheat. His imports included large quantities of wine from Bordeaux, iron from northern Spain, and woad and other dyestuffs from Toulouse, the Azores and Genoa. In addition he imported oil for use by cloth-workers and soap-boilers, and occasionally small quantities of fish and salt. These goods were conveyed in various ships, including his own ship the *Trinity* which in 1539 was reckoned to be worth £250.¹² The *Trinity* was regularly used for trade with Spain and Bordeaux, and her cargoes included goods for many Bristol merchants, for the merchants adopted the sensible policy of consigning their goods to several ships in order to lessen the risk of total loss which might follow the wreck of one ship. The inventory of the *Trinity* was made in 1539 when she was temporarily being used in the King's service during a period of threatened war with France and Spain, so that in addition to her 'hull, mastes, takle, sayles, 4 ankers, 4 cables', she also had several large guns and cannon as well as 'bowes, arrowes, bills, morys pikes and dartes and other monycions'.

It is a tribute to John Smyth's energy that as well as successfully managing a large and lucrative business he was also able to devote so much time to public affairs. The profit on his trading ventures enabled him to invest in land and to establish the family as major land-owners. His acquisitions included the manors of Stanshawes and Sturdon and other lands at Winterbourne and Newnham in South Gloucestershire, houses in Bristol including his own house in Small Street to which he moved from Corn Street in 1549, and property in Somerset including lands at Huntspill, Ston Easton, Keynsham, Wookey, Durleigh, Bridgwater and Wells. But by far his most important investment was the Long Ashton estate which he bought in 1545 from Sir Thomas Arundell for £920. The estate consisted of the fifteenth century manor house at Ashton Court, comprising a tower, a great hall and gallery, a parlour, chapel, kitchen, several chambers and stable buildings, barns, a gatehouse, dairy, brew-house and lodgings for the estate workmen; it also included most of the surrounding land.

John Smyth was quick to take advantage of the opportunities

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-4.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16, 97.

presented by the confiscations of ecclesiastical property and the subsequent sale of former church lands by the Crown. In 1546 he bought from the King the manor of Ashton Meriets, adjoining his estate at Long Ashton and the advowson of the parish church, all of which had formerly belonged to the Priory of St. Peter in Bath. This property was purchased for £477 6s. 0d. In the following year he also bought the former Choke chantry at Long Ashton for £181 2s. 8d.¹³

John Smyth had few pretensions to gentility for himself, although he did acquire a Grant of Arms in 1544 in which he is described as 'John Smythe of Bristowe, gentleman, of the Lordship of Long Aisheton in the County of Somercet';¹⁴ but he continued to live in his merchant's house in Small Street, and did not move to the manor house at Long Ashton. His ledger and his correspondence show him as a careful shrewd though kindly man, anxious to avoid conflict wherever possible, unwilling to proceed harshly against debtors, and concerned to avoid litigation and legal costs, as he wrote concerning a dispute over property in 1546 'my conscious will not consent to use the opportunite or vigor of the lawe in this matar, as also partly for the avoiding of trouble.'¹⁵ At his death in 1556 the outstanding debts owing to him amounted to £816; this sum included £621 5s. 8d. owed by 26 people and a further £195 8s. 5d. owed by 17 people and described as 'desperate debts'.¹⁶ He had a few staunch friends, including several Bristol merchants, among them some who had been his own apprentices, and most notably the Bristolian, Dr. George Owen, who was Henry VIII's physician and an influential figure at Court.¹⁷ It would, however, be wrong to over-stress the picture of a sober merchant, for there was another side to his character. He obviously dressed well, and the inventory of his goods made soon after his death shows his clothing as worth the large sum of £42, and includes several fine gowns and cloaks, among them 'a gowne of skarlett furred' worth £3, and 'a skarlett cloke furred with grey' valued at £5. Somewhat surprisingly, his will reveals that he had a young illegitimate daughter living in London, to whom he openly left forty marks (£26 13s. 4d.) to be conveyed to her by Hugh Hammond, a Bristol merchant who had been one of Smyth's apprentices 'I give and bequeathe to my base daughter now dwelling in London whome my frende Hugh Hammon(d) doo knowe, fortye markes good and lawfull money of Englande to be payde at her maryadge yf she lyve to be mar-

ryed.'¹⁸ No further details have been found concerning this daughter. By his will, dated 1555, most of his property was left to his two sons, Hugh and Matthew, although he made bequests to the poor at Long Ashton and on his manor of Sturdon, and left money to be used 'in dressinge the cawsey (causeway) that ledeth from thende of Bedmynster towarde my mansyon house at Longe Ashton'.¹⁹ The inventory of his possessions shows him as a very wealthy man, with goods and money to the value of £2,263 14s. 0d., including the large sum of £990 0s. 0d. in ready money, and plate worth £335 12s. 0d. He was still primarily a merchant, however, and his house in Small Street included his 'shopp' or counting house with its scales and weights, and at the time his death there were thirteen tons of iron worth £130 stored at his house.²⁰

For his sons, John Smyth clearly had high aspirations, and they were evidently expected to adopt a life-style very different from that of their father. Only two of John Smyth's sons survived him, Hugh, who was born in 1530, and Matthew, born in 1533. Both sons were sent to Oxford at an early age. In 1545 when Hugh was 15 and Matthew only 12, John Smyth recorded that he had sent £5 10s. 0d. 'unto my sons at Oxford', and in 1547 they were still there, for there is a reference in the ledger to £6 'paide in Oxford at sundry tymes to my sons Hewgh and Mathewe Smythes'.²¹ Neither of the boys appears to have taken a degree at Oxford, but as was common for the sons of wealthy country gentlemen in the sixteenth century, both went on from Oxford in 1550 to complete their education at the Inns of Court in London, Hugh to the Inner Temple and Matthew to the Middle Temple. They stayed at the Inns of Court longer than many young men. Hugh remained at the Inner Temple until 1553 when he came back to Bristol to be married, and Matthew entered upon a career in law, and remained as a lawyer at the Middle Temple throughout his life. During his career Matthew achieved considerable prominence in the Middle Temple and his name occurs frequently in the records. He was Master of the Revels in 1558, and in 1563 he lent £60 to the Society; later he was elected Treasurer and served in that office from 1570 to 1573. During the seventeenth century Matthew Smyth's coat of arms was added to the collection of the arms of prominent members of the society in the windows of the Middle Temple Hall.²²

No record survives to cast any light on the activities of the two

13. B.R.O. AC/C2/1; AC/D1/143-150; 36074/13, 14 a-b, 35, 36; AC/F8/1; AC/F8/3.

14. J. Vanes, *op. cit.* App. I, p.320.

15. B.R.O. AC/C1/1-7.

16. B.R.O. AC/F8/1.

17. D.N.B., vol xiv, p.1301. J. Vanes, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 25, 27, 209, 256, 281.

18. B.R.O. AC/F7/3; AC/F8/1.

19. B.R.O. AC/F7/3.

20. B.R.O. AC/F8/1.

21. B.R.O. AC/F7/3. J. Vanes, *op. cit.*, pp. 112, 293.

22. C. H. Hopwood, *A Calendar of the Middle Temple Records*, 1903, pp. 16-19. A. R. Ingpen, *The Middle Temple Bench Book*, 1912, p.151.

brothers at Oxford, but from their stay as students at the Inns of Court there emerges the first evidence of that reckless, defiant spirit which contrasts strongly with the cautious, conciliatory style of their father, and which was on several occasions to get them into serious trouble. In July 1552 Hugh Smyth was summoned before the authorities of the Inner Temple and was fined and suspended for three months 'for giving Master Lawton, one of the outer barristers, a blow on the ear, because the said Lawton counselled some one to arrest the brother of the said Smyth for debt, which offence is of such importance that, for the perilous example thereof, it may not well be remitted . . .'.²³ Shortly after this both brothers were again in serious trouble over a quarrel with a Mr. Carew. Unfortunately we are not told the occasion of this quarrel, nor is any further detail given concerning the identity of 'Mr. Carew', but the Carews were important and numerous in the West Country, and one branch of the family lived at Camerton, among them Thomas Carew who was of a similar age to the Smyth brothers and who certainly figured in their affairs later. This Thomas Carew may well have been the person with whom the Smyth brothers quarrelled so violently in London, though there is no firm evidence to support this conclusion apart from his later involvement with them which will be described in due course. The quarrel was evidently very serious, for John Smyth had to intervene on his sons' behalf, and was obliged to use the good offices of his friend Dr. Owen, the King's physician, to save his sons from the consequences of their actions. In spite of Dr. Owens' efforts, it cost John Smyth £40 to extricate his two sons from this difficulty, and they also had to promise to keep the peace in the future. At the conclusion of the affair, Dr. Owen wrote from Court to John Smyth, and his letter dated 9 March 1554 contains several hints that the conduct of Hugh and Matthew during their stay in London had not been without other similar incidents. Owen wrote that 'I am as glad that the matter is brought to a good pass for your quiet and for the two sons safety, as you yourself, and for God's sake give them advyce to be ware of such lyke myschance, for there is no man so strong nor so hardy but he may meet with his match . . . Now it is done I would say to you I had never so much to do for any on matters in my lyfe.' We can imagine that John Smyth had already given such advice, though perhaps more strongly worded, to his sons when he sent the very large sum of £40 to buy them out of trouble.²⁴

It was no doubt in an attempt to prevent any similar trouble

23. F. A. Inderwick, *A Calendar of the Inner Temple Records*, 1896, vol i, 1505-1603, pp. 165-166.

24. B.R.O. AC/C5.

that John Smyth decided that it was time Hugh came home and got married. As the heir to his father's business and estates, Hugh was an attractive match. In 1552 William Portman of Orchard Portman in Somerset had written to John Smyth to suggest a marriage for either Hugh or Matthew with 'a daughter of my Cosyn Pophams who would be glad to match with you for the wisdom that he knoweth in you and for the good report he heyrth of your sonnes and so wold I lykewise, and as for the young gentlewoman I doubt not whosoever shall have her she will prove very gentle and obedyent . . .'.²⁵ Nothing came of this proposal, and in December 1553 an agreement was made between John Smyth and another Somerset landowner, Hugh Byccombe of Crowcombe, whereby Hugh Smyth was to marry Maud Byccombe, younger of the two daughters of Hugh Byccombe. John Smyth agreed to grant to Hugh and his wife Maud upon their marriage Ashton Meriets, Long Ashton parsonage and various other lands and tenements in Bridgwater, Ston Easton, Huntspill, Whitchurch, Bristol and elsewhere. At the time of the marriage Hugh Byccombe was to pay 'upon the font stone of the parish church of Crowcombe' £200 and was to grant the couple lands in Bishops Lydiard, Stogumber, Timberscombe, Dunster and elsewhere.²⁶ The Byccombe family had held a moiety of the manor of Crowcombe for several generations. Hugh Byccombe and his wife, Elizabeth, had no sons, but two daughters, Elizabeth and Maud; shortly after Maud's marriage to Hugh Smyth, her father arranged a general settlement of his property, whereby Crowcombe and neighbouring properties went to Elizabeth, and Broomfield and various smaller estates went to Maud, leaving their father with a life interest in his estates. In January 1557 Elizabeth Byccombe was married to Thomas Carew who had formerly lived at Camerton; the newly-married couple settled at Crowcombe where their descendants continued to live until the twentieth century.²⁷ No evidence has so far been found to connect this Thomas Carew definitely with the 'Mr. Carew' with whom the Smyth brothers had quarrelled a few years earlier in London, but the coincidence of the name is certainly suggestive. Hugh Byccombe's settlement of his property upon his daughters had an interesting sequel, for in 1560 his first wife, Elizabeth, died and within two months Hugh Byccombe had married a second wife, Catherine Wilshaw, by whom he had a son and a daughter. During the 1560s he pursued a long but unsuccessful attempt to over-

25. B.R.O. AC/C4.

26. B.R.O. AC/S1/1a.

27. Somerset Record Office, DD/TB/Box 5/FL 1. J. Collinson, *History of Somerset*, iii, p.516. H. C. Maxwell Lyte, (ed.) *Historical Notes on Some Somerset Manors* Somerset Record Society (Extra Series), 1931, pp. 68, 292.

throw the earlier settlement of his property in favour of the son by his second marriage.²⁸

To return to the Smyth family, it is significant of the rise in the status and pretensions of the family that while John Smyth remained in his merchant's house in Small Street, Hugh and his bride immediately took up residence at Long Ashton and began to live as country gentry. John Smyth died in 1556 and was buried in St. Werburgh's church in Bristol. His widow, Joan, lived on at Small Street until her death in 1560. During the 1560s the house in Small Street and most of the other property which the Smyths owned in Bristol was sold.²⁹

Hugh Smyth became a justice of the peace for Somerset and began to take an increasing part in local affairs. But he proved to be an highly unsatisfactory justice, and his violent disposition did not for long enable him to live at peace with his neighbours. In 1564 a warrant was sent to the Mayor of Bristol from the Queen's Privy Council ordering the arrest of Hugh Smyth and his brother Matthew 'who have of late in such sort misbehaved themselves towards Mr. Gorge the Queen's Majesty's servant, having been set into these parts for the Queen's Majesty's service . . .' The two brothers met in London where presumably they were able to make their peace with the Council, for there is no further reference to the matter.³⁰

In May 1575 Hugh Smyth together with John Colles was summoned before the Privy Council 'for making, rehersinge or publishing of certen sclaunderous rymes made against Sir John Yonge, Knight, a thinge of very evill example and not (to) be winked at . . .' Because Sir John Young did not wish to proceed in the matter the Council contented itself with giving the two culprits a stern warning, telling them 'how moche theis kinde of dealinges are misliked of their Lordshipps, as farre unseemly for any gentilmen, Justices of Peace and neighbours to make, utter or publishe against any of his callinge'. They were dismissed and ordered not to offend again 'apon paine of her Majesties indignacion'.³¹ Again, in March 1577 the Privy Council considered complaints of 'oppression and other misdemeanours' made against Hugh Smyth, and he was summoned before the Council on 24

April 1577 and warned about his conduct.³² He was again in trouble in 1578 when his fellow Justices in north Somerset complained to the Privy Council about his conduct, and questioned whether he was a fit person to be allowed to continue as a Justice of the Peace. Their long list of complaints includes references to his many disputes 'quarrels, disorders and uncomely speeches', his abuse of his position as a Justice, his illegal dealings in the export of wheat, his conduct in licensing unsuitable alehouses 'more fitter to retain thieves and keep filthy rule than for any other good consideration', and his retaining of a gang of ruffians at Ashton Court who terrorised the neighbourhood.³³ At the same time there were further complaints from Sir John Young against the 'extreme mallice' which Hugh Smyth showed to him; and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Smyth had deliberately set out to annoy all his neighbours.³⁴ Again he was summoned to appear before the Privy Council, but this time was prevented from doing so by illness. Before he had recovered sufficiently to be able to answer the summons, he was involved in an even more dramatic episode.

Amongst those who had complained about Hugh Smyth's conduct in 1578 was his near neighbour Sir George Norton of Abbots Leigh, and there was evidently considerable ill-feeling between the two neighbours. In September 1579 a gang of Hugh Smyth's retainers came by night and raided the rabbit warren at Abbots Leigh. They were interrupted in their poaching by two of Sir George Norton's men who were armed with bows and arrows, and in the dark a fierce battle ensued. One of the Abbots Leigh men, a shepherd, was overpowered by the poachers who tied him up with his own bowstring and his own garters and beat him severely; but meanwhile his companion, the warrener, though pursued by some of the other poachers and in spite of the darkness, fired an arrow which hit one of the attackers. John Blanche, who fell to the ground mortally wounded. The Ashton Court party thereupon retreated, taking their dying comrade with them, while the two Abbots Leigh men went to report the episode to Sir George Norton. At daybreak Sir George ordered his men to follow the tracks of the raiders with hounds, and the trail led them straight to Ashton Court. Moreover in the warren they found a dead hare and equipment left by the poachers, 'all coloured red with the stain of Ashton soil', part of the arrow which had been broken off as the dying man fell, and a pike staff which

28. J. Batten, 'Documents relating to the families of Craucombe and Carew' *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*, vol vi, 1898, pp. 49-56.

29. B.R.O. AC/F8/3; AC/F8/4; AC/F1/4; AC/F1/5. L.U. Way, 'Miscellaneous Bristol Deeds', *Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society Transactions*, vol xlii, 1920, pp. 108, 119-120. B.R.O. 36074/36 contains a valuation of John Smyth's estates.

30. B.R.O. AC/F7/1-3.

31. *Acts of the Privy Council 1571-1575*, pp. 374, 387. John Colles was a J.P. and a member of a wealthy Somerset family with lands in various parts of the county. See J. Collinson, *op. cit.*, ii, p.490, iii, pp. 275, 285. Sir John Young had entertained Queen Elizabeth at his new 'Great House' in Bristol during her visit to the city, and had been knighted for his pains. He also owned the manor of Easton-in-Gordano. See J. Collinson, *op. cit.*, iii, p.149; S. Seyer, *Memoirs of Bristol*, 1823, ii, pp. 244-245.

32. *Acts of the Privy Council 1575-1577*, pp. 316, 332.

33. B.R.O. AC/O16. A complete list of the complaints is given in L.U. Way, 'The Smyths of Ashton Court', *Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society Transactions*, xxxi, 1908, pp. 248-251. See also *Acts of the Privy Council 1577-1578*, pp. 230, 232.

34. *Acts of the Privy Council 1577-1578*, p.248.

the village blacksmith of Long Ashton later identified as being one which he had made for John Blanche, the man who had been killed. At Ashton Court, however, Hugh Smyth stoutly refused to allow them to search his premises or to arrest any of his men. Sir George Norton therefore complained to the county sheriff and to his fellow justices. The affair was sufficiently serious for it to come to the notice of the Privy Council, and all the parties were summoned to London for trial.³⁵ Because of his increasingly poor health and also because he presumably believed that the trial would be a long process, Hugh Smyth purchased a house in London, at Pye Corner in the parish of St. Sepulchre, and took up residence there early in 1580.

Whilst he was in London awaiting the trial, his health deteriorated rapidly, and before the legal proceedings commenced, he died on 2 March 1580. During his last illness in London Hugh Smyth was attended by Roderigo Lopez, a Portuguese Jew who was one of the most famous medical practitioners of the time and who later became the court physician to Queen Elizabeth.³⁶ Hugh Smyth was buried in the church of St. Sepulchre, but a year later his body was dis-interred and brought back to Long Ashton for re-burial. An indication of the style in which he had lived, and of the contrast which this presents with the sober, careful way of life of his father, can be seen in the expenses of his funeral. These amounted to £243, and included dressing both his house and the churches of St. Sepulchre and Long Ashton in black, an elaborate display of his coat of arms, a sumptuous funeral cortège, and £15 5s. 6d. for the hire of a waggon to bring his body from St. Sepulchre's to Long Ashton. His father, John Smyth, by contrast, had ordered in his will of 1556 that he should be buried 'in Christian buryall with such devyne service as for a good Christian man shulde apperteyne'. The difference between the funeral services of father and son is a measure of how far the family had progressed between 1556 and 1580.³⁷

Even after Hugh Smyth's death the Privy Council continued to receive complaints about the way in which he had behaved as a justice of the peace, about his dealings with his neighbours, and even about 'certain unreverend speeches against her Majesty, the Council and all the ladies and gentlemen of the Court', which

35. B.R.O. AC/F1/4; AC/C17/1-3; AC/C18/1-10; 36074/68; 36074/1a-b. *Acts of the Privy Council 1578-1580*, p.292.

36. B.R.O. AC/C18/10. In 1594 Roderigo Lopez was executed for being implicated in a plot to murder Queen Elizabeth. He is thought to have been the original of Shakespeare's Shylock. For details of his career see *Dictionary of National Biography*. A receipt signed by Lopez for money received from Matthew Smyth in payment for his treatment of Hugh Smyth, 'for my Counsell in Phisicke', dated 21 June 1581 was sold by Sothebys in 1977—Sotheby's 'Fonthill' Sale Catalogue, 5-6 July 1977, Lot 119. I am grateful to Miss Mary Williams for drawing my attention to this reference.

37. B.R.O. 36074/68; AC/F7/3.



Sir Hugh Smyth 1575-1627.
The portrait is in the Red Lodge, Bristol, and is reproduced by courtesy of the City Art Gallery.
Photograph: Gordon Kelsey



Elizabeth Gorges who became the wife of Sir Hugh Smyth in 1604, and was the mother of Thomas Smyth. After Sir Hugh's death in 1627 she married her cousin, Sir Ferdinando Gorges. The portrait is in the Bristol City Art Gallery.

Photograph: George Kelsey



Thomas Smyth 1609-1642

At the time this picture was painted Thomas Smyth must have been about four or five years of age, and according to the custom of the time, was still in long clothes. The inscription along the top of the portrait giving brief details of his life was added later. The portrait is reproduced by kind permission of the owners, Leeds Castle Foundation, Maidstone, Kent.

Photograph: Gordon Kelsey



*Florence Poulett, wife of Thomas Smyth.
The portrait is now in the Red Lodge, Bristol.*

Photograph: George Kelsey

Smyth was alleged to have uttered.³⁸ Hugh Smyth had no male heirs, and upon his death all the property passed to his brother, Matthew Smyth, the barrister. Matthew had married Jane, the daughter of Thomas Tewther of Ludlow, by whom he had one son. When he succeeded to the Long Ashton estates in 1580 Matthew was still in practice as a barrister at the Middle Temple. He had prospered in his profession, and had purchased lands in Essex and also possessed a fine house at Redcross Street by the Barbican in the City of London. Matthew continued his practice in London, but sold his lands in Essex and his London residence, and his family moved to Ashton Court. His London house was purchased in June 1581 by Dame Elizabeth Goldynge for £566.³⁹ Matthew was evidently very interested in his newly acquired property, for one of his wife's letters written from Ashton Court in 1581 to her husband in London survives and gives many details of the estate, of work in progress, the purchase of cattle at fairs in Wales for fattening in the park, work on extending the park, and of the purchase of wines and other necessities for the household. Other surviving letters to Matthew also make it clear that he took an active interest in the deer park at Long Ashton, in the warren, and in other estate and farming matters.⁴⁰ Matthew Smyth did not, however, long enjoy his estate, for he died in 1583 and was buried in the newly-constructed family vault in Long Ashton church.

Matthew's only son, Hugh, was eight years old when his father died, but Matthew's widow, Jane Smyth, managed the estate on her son's behalf until her death in 1594.⁴¹ Jane Smyth supervised the estate with energy and efficiency, and added considerably to it. In 1584 she completed the purchase of the manor of Elmington in Henbury parish (Gloucestershire) from Thomas Southwell, for which negotiations had been started by Matthew, and in 1593 she acquired the greater part of the manor of Ashton Philips in Long Ashton. In 1583-4 she also purchased land to extend the park at Ashton Court — 'from the east part of Clerken Lane into Medyates extending southwards to the nearest high way that leads to Bristol, and north to the common down of Ashton'.⁴² The wealth of the Smyth family continued to increase during the later sixteenth century, largely as a result of the income from their estate. This is reflected in the family's continuing investment in land during this period. Hugh, Matthew and Jane Smyth all added manors and lands to the estate, so that by the end of the

38. *Calendar of State Papers (Domestic) 1581-1590*, p.147. *Acts of the Privy Council 1580-1581*, p.276.

39. B.R.O. 36074/2.

40. B.R.O. AC/C21; AC/C22; AC/C26; AC/C31/5.

41. B.R.O. AC/F1/4; AC/C34; 36074/2.

42. B.R.O. AC/C38; AC/C39.

sixteenth century its size had been greatly increased by the purchase of the manors of Ridgeway (Glos.), Compton Dando (Somerset), Horsington (Somerset), Elmington in Henbury (Glos.) and Filton in Whitchurch (Somerset) as well as lands and property elsewhere including tenements, shops, and inns in Bristol, among the latter 'le Cock in the Hoope in High Street'.⁴³ Most of these lands were let to tenants, generally by copyhold tenure, and in 1596 the annual income from the estate was calculated as £379 18s. 11d.⁴⁴ But the total income of the family was substantially higher than this, for there was a large demesne farm at Ashton Court and some of the land at Bishopsword and Filton as well as other land in Somerset was used as part of the home farm both as arable land and for cattle-rearing and horse-breeding. For example at the time of his death in 1581, Hugh Smyth possessed, in addition to corn, crops and arable equipment, the following stock at Long Ashton and on neighbouring lands — 23 horses, 20 pigs, 18 oxen, 40 kyne, 1 bull, 45 young cattle, 491 sheep and 62 lambs.⁴⁵

Under Matthew's son Hugh (later Sir Hugh) Smyth, who came of age in 1596, the family were to complete the journey from the ranks of tradesmen and minor merchants to that of the upper gentry. Hugh Smyth's large estates made him one of the most considerable landowners in north Somerset, and he was one of those who were knighted by King James I on his progress from Scotland to London in 1603. Sir Hugh travelled to Worksop to meet the King and to receive his knighthood.⁴⁶ He continued the policy of buying land, and in 1606 purchased the manor of Bedminster, adjacent both to Ashton Court and to the lands which the family already possessed at Whitchurch. This was later to prove a very profitable investment, for the coal mines at Bedminster were to be an important source of income for future members of the family. In 1605 also Sir Hugh Smyth purchased from Sir Robert Young and his relations, the Strangeways family, the Great House which stood on the site of the former Carmelite Friary in Bristol. This once again established the family with a base in Bristol from which to play a major part in the affairs of the city.⁴⁷

In 1605 the family took a further step forward into the sphere of national and even international affairs when Sir Hugh Smyth was chosen to accompany the Earl of Hertford on an embassy to the Archduke of Austria to complete a peace agreement between

the Archduke and James I.⁴⁸ A year earlier in 1604 Sir Hugh had married Elizabeth Gorges, eldest daughter of Sir Thomas Gorges of Langford (now called Longford) Castle in Wiltshire. This marriage brought the Smyth family into alliance with a family of great wealth and close connections both with the Court and with some of the noblest families in England. Sir Thomas Gorges had been a Gentleman Usher at Court and had married the strikingly-beautiful, Swedish-born widow of the Marquess of Northampton; she had earlier been one of Queen Elizabeth's Maids of Honour. The wealth of the family was demonstrated in 1591, when Sir Thomas Gorges completed the building of Longford Castle in a completely novel triangular form.⁴⁹ The marriage of Sir Hugh Smyth and Elizabeth Gorges produced five daughters and one son, Thomas, who was born in 1609. But the marriage seems not to have been a happy one. Sir Hugh Smyth was a melancholy, difficult man, afflicted with ill-health and reluctant to receive any visitors at Ashton Court. Several of Elizabeth Smyth's letters written to her son, Thomas, survive, mostly written after Thomas went to St. John's College, Oxford at the age of 13 in 1622. They show her deep affection for the boy as well as the difficulties she had with her husband.⁵⁰ In 1622, for example, soon after Thomas had gone to Oxford, his mother wrote begging him to send her regular accounts of 'the delittes you dayely beholde, I pray you make the like observation of all things worthy note, as if you wear a travelor in a foraine country'; a little later she commended Thomas for buying 'globes' at Oxford, 'for this will afford you pleasure of contenance when other toyes would have soon decayed and have ben nether useful long for bodie nor minde'. In another letter she again exhorted him to be careful with his money, 'to prevent all idel expenses and yet live like a gentleman of your owne degree'. Thomas' winter clothes were ordered from Mr. Betty, a tailor of Temple Bar in London, and Elizabeth worried whether the clothes would fit properly, and had constantly to remind her son of the importance of wrapping up warmly, 'I hope Betty toucke measure of you beinge with you that when he makes you winter clothes they may be bige inoughe. I know you will have care to keepe your selfe as warme as you may when the cold weather comes in with such as you have. Remember your necke and feett'. But Sir Hugh's increasing ill-health and uncertain temper are the dark background

43. B.R.O. AC/S1/2; AC/M3/20; AC/M11/13; AC/S7/9a-b.

44. B.R.O. 36074/36; 36074/3.

45. B.R.O. AC/F8/3; AC/F8/4.

46. B.R.O. AC/F1/4; 36074/3.

47. B.R.O. 36074/46. J. Latimer, *Sixteenth Century Bristol*, 1908, pp. 119-121.

48. B.R.O. AC/F1/4; 36074/46.

49. N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Wiltshire*, 1963. R. Gorges, *The Story of a Family*, Boston, 1944. Hellena Marchioness of Northampton had come to England in the party which accompanied Eric, King of Sweden, a suitor for the hand of Queen Elizabeth in 1563. She was chosen as a maid of honour by the Queen, and spent the rest of her life in England, marrying first the Marquis of Northampton who died in 1571. She then married Sir Thomas Gorges. Some of the letters of Hellena to her son-in-law, Sir Hugh Smyth, and to her grandson, Thomas Smyth, survive (B.R.O. AC/C42/1-3; AC/C52/1-2).

50. B.R.O. AC/C48/1-29.

to this delightful series of letters. In 1626, a year before Sir Hugh died, Elizabeth Smyth wrote to her son about his father's illness and depression, and of her loneliness at Ashton Court, 'you may imagine what good company wee are like to have here, for here comes not any but such as are sent for and coler (anger) doth as much abound with us as ever it did, God increase my patience to endure it still'.⁵¹ Sir Hugh's sombre expression in his portrait which is reproduced in this pamphlet, showing him in his black armour, lends added poignancy to his wife's concern about his health.

Some of the letters written by Thomas from Oxford also survive and show his concern for his father's health and increasing melancholy. In 1626 Thomas wrote of his intention to consult a Mr. Parsons at St. John's College about possible treatment for his father. 'You are beholding to Mr. Parsons, for his often remembering you, and I purpose as soon as this busie time is past, to know (as between him and myselfe) his opinion of your infirmities. In the interim and ever I will beseech almighty God that you may have no need of any of their skill, and that hee will send you speedy recovery and continuance of health to the great comfort and uncessant desier of your most obedient and affectionate Sonne, Thomas Smyth'. A few months earlier, Mr. Parsons himself had written to Sir Hugh, giving advice and enclosing a recipe for a medicine to cure insomnia.⁵² On several occasions other members of the family tried to rouse Sir Hugh from the depression and melancholy which had seized upon him during the last years of his life. In 1623 Sir Ferdinando Gorges, Elizabeth's cousin, wrote to Sir Hugh after hearing that he proposed to withdraw his money and support from a project for colonisation in New England, to upbraid him both for his refusal to leave Ashton Court or to see any friends, and for his lack of drive and initiative. 'Butt he is onely fitt for itt to whom god gives the spiritt to undergoe itt. And seeing itt is not our fortune to enjoye your companie, I can butt be as sorrye for itt, as you wilbe when you shall understand the wronge you doe yourself in itt'.⁵³ In 1625 Sir Hugh's brother-in-law, Edward Gorges, implored him to be more active and to throw off his despondency 'the which I much wonder you should be possessed with at all; no man in temporal blessings having more cause of comfort than yourselfe'.⁵⁴

Sir Hugh Smyth died in 1627 and was buried in the family vault in Long Ashton church. In 1629 his widow, Elizabeth, married her

cousin Sir Ferdinando Gorges. He could hardly have differed more from her first husband, for Sir Ferdinando was an extremely active, vigorous man who had been a soldier and fought under Essex in the Netherlands, had been knighted at the siege of Rouen, and later played a major part in the colonisation of New England. He was the first Governor of New England and Lord Proprietor of Maine.⁵⁵ Sir Ferdinando and his wife, Elizabeth, lived mainly at the Lower Court in Long Ashton, and occasionally also at the Great House in Bristol.

Meanwhile Thomas Smyth had completed his education at Oxford; he had matriculated at St. John's College in 1624, and had remained at Oxford until 1626. It is clear that his time there was primarily intended to prepare him to be a gentleman, for in 1624 his tutor, Dr. Atkinson, wrote to Sir Hugh to report on the progress made by Thomas, and added 'I was ever an enemy to plodding in any one, most of all in a Gentleman. And I know itt is not your intent to have him earn his bread by his books. When you left him here I tooke upon me the charge of a Gentleman, I shall blush to returne him to you againe a meere Scholler'.⁵⁶ In 1627, when Thomas was eighteen years of age, his father died and Thomas succeeded to the estate; in this year also he became a member of Parliament for Bridgwater. Three days before his father's death Thomas had married Florence Poulett, the eldest daughter of Lord Poulett of Hinton St. George in Somerset.⁵⁷ This marriage linked the Smyths to another leading family and brought them into the forefront of Somerset society. The marriage was evidently a very happy one, judging by the charming letters written by Florence to her husband when he was away in Parliament or when she was visiting her parents at Hinton St. George. Most of the letters are undated but it is obvious from references which they contain that they cover the whole of the marriage. Typical is a letter written by Florence in June 1641 when Thomas was in London attending the Long Parliament, 'My Dear Hart, I am exceedingly glad to heare thou art so well and that thou wishest thy selfe at home. For my part tis not day nor nitli that I wish for thee but ourli . . .'. Thomas evidently preserved his wife's letters carefully. Three sons and six daughters were born to Thomas Smyth and his wife Florence, and their eldest son, Hugh, was to become the first baronet.⁵⁸ As a Member of Parliament Thomas was a staunch royalist, and his connection with Lord Poulett made him even more acceptable to the royal party. He was also very active

51. B.R.O. AC/C48/2.4.5. Mr. Betty was also tailor to Sir Hugh Smyth, and later, when Thomas Smyth became an M.P., letters from Ashton Court were sent to him in London at 'Mr. Betty the tailor's house in Temple Bar'. A series of letters written to Sir Hugh Smyth by his godson Stephen Smith from Lincoln's Inn gave elaborate details of the latest London fashions and of clothes which had been ordered from Betty for Sir Hugh. See Sotheby's 'Fonthill' Sale Catalogue 5-6 July 1977, Lot 126.

52. B.R.O. 36074/107.108.

53. B.R.O. AC/C45/2.

54. B.R.O. AC/C46/5.

55. R. Gorges, *The Story of a Family*, Boston, 1944. C. M. MacInnes, *Ferdinando Gorges and New England*, Bristol, Branch of the Historical Association 1965.

56. B.R.O. AC/C44/1, 4.

57. The haste with which Thomas was married, just before his father's death, was to prevent the Court of Wards having any hand in arranging a marriage for him when he succeeded to his father's property while still legally a minor. M. J. Hawkins, (ed.), *Sales of Wards in Somerset 1603-1641* Somerset Record Society, vol. 67, 1965, p. xv.

58. B.R.O. AC/F1/4; AC/C60/1-22.

as a Justice of the Peace in Somerset.⁵⁹ In 1636, during the period of non-Parliamentary rule, Thomas Smyth was included in a list of Somerset gentry drawn up by the Privy Council as favourable to the royal cause, and he was stated to be a Justice of the Peace, to have an annual income of £2,000 and to be the son-in-law of Lord Poulett.⁶⁰ In 1641 when Thomas was again elected to represent Bridgwater in Parliament, he also received the freedom of the city of Bristol 'for the mutual love and amitie which for many yeares past hath been by and between the Burgesses and Inhabitants of the said cittie and the right worshipful Gent. Thomas Smith of Long Ashton in the countie of Somerset Esquire and other his Ancestors and Allies as also for the better contynuacion of their antient friendship for the time to come . . .'.⁶¹

Thomas Smyth took a close interest in the management of his estate, and some of his detailed account books survive giving details of farm work at Long Ashton, the care of the deer in the park, the running of the large household and the business of his numerous manors. The letters of his bailiff, John Edwards, also provide detailed evidence of the way in which the estate was run. The household at Ashton Court included, besides the family, seventeen male servants employed in and about the house, among them a jester ('the foole'), seven 'hinds' or farm labourers employed on the demesne farm who lived in a separate part of the house, and five chambermaids.⁶² All these had to be fed and accommodated. A note in Thomas Smyth's handwriting dated 1641 lists the annual costs of this household as amounting to £548.⁶³ This was made up as follows:—

First in wages (for the 29 servants)	£100
22 beeves at £5 per beeve	£110
100 sheep at 13s 4d	£ 66
340 bushells of malt	£ 52
In breade we spende £5 per month	£ 60
In Acates etc.	£ 80
In wyne	£ 40
In spice	£ 20
In soape	£ 5
In Cole	£ 15
Total	£548

59. E. H. Bates Harbin, (ed.), *Quarter Sessions Records for the County of Somerset 1625-1639*, Somerset Record Society, vol. 24, 1908, pp. 196, 220, 225, 246, 251, 262, 285. B.R.O. 36074/149, 150; 36214.

60. B.R.O. SP 16/432/34. T. G. Barnes, *Somerset 1625-1640: A County's Government during the 'Personal Rule'*, 1961, p. 135.

61. The certificate is quoted in full in L.U. Way, 'The Smyths of Ashton Court', *Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Transactions*, vol. xxxi, 1908, pp. 255-256.

62. B.R.O. 36074/72, 73, 74, 76, 78, 140, 156, 158.

63. B.R.O. 36074/78 'Beeves' were cows and bullocks; 'acates' were all the other provisions which had to be purchased for the household.

During the period from 1629 to 1640 when Parliament was not summoned, Thomas Smyth was engaged upon extensive building work on the south-west wing of Ashton Court. His account book contains many references, particularly in 1633, to the carriage of stone, timber and scaffolding 'for the buyldinge' and 'for the worke' at Ashton Court. Loads of stone were brought from Dundry and from Bath, and payments were made to workmen for digging out cellars and foundations, for sawing timber and for helping the masons. The masons and carpenters engaged on the work were evidently paid separately, since their wages are not included in the account book. By 1634 building was sufficiently well advanced for work to begin on the gardens, bowling green and walks, and, for example, payments were made for work on 'the garden by the New Buyldinge'; in 1635 the accounts contain entries referring to making the stairs to the gallery and to providing frames for the pictures (e.g. 'laid out for canvas and glue for the Pictures 3s-0d'). The evidence of the building itself suggests that some earlier additions had been made to the house including part of the large south-west wing, possibly by Sir Hugh Smyth, and that this work was completed in the latest architectural style by Thomas Smyth. Certainly this impressive addition to the house, in a classical style which was architecturally very advanced for its time, provides a visible reminder of the wealth, position and opulent life-style of the Smyth family at this time.⁶⁴

As well as details of the estate and household, Thomas Smyth's letters also contain much information about political matters — the controversies between King and Parliament, the unpopularity of the bishops, the 'ship money' affair, the Scots rebellion, and other current issues.⁶⁵ In March 1641, for example, when he was in London at the Long Parliament, he wrote despondently to his bailiff, John Edwards, 'I am in hast and wearied out dayly with attendinge my Lord of Strafford's trail which has held since Monday seven night and is not halfe waye ended. If hee bee not more speedily dispatched ye kingdome will be undone and I feare we shall have somewhat to do to ridd ye Scotts and bryng this parliament to a successful conclusion.'⁶⁶ During his absences from Ashton Court, Thomas was anxious to be kept informed about the estate and received reports from Edwards on the work being done, the progress of the crops and livestock, on manorial matters and the granting of tenancies and on household affairs. Thomas also worried about the education of his eldest son, Hugh. In 1641 when Hugh was nine years old, a private tutor, Mr. Foster, was engaged,

64. B.R.O. 36074/72, 74, 76, 140, 156. N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol*, 1958 pp. 61, 220-221. I am grateful to Miss Mary Williams for her help and advice over this section.

65. B.R.O. 36074/136, 137, 138, 139. Important details of speeches in Parliament in June 1628 are contained in 36074/117a.

66. B.R.O. 36074/156.

who lived at Ashton Court as one of the family, but Thomas was not satisfied either with the boy's progress or with the tutor's discipline, and again Edwards was asked to send him a report. In June 1641 Edwards wrote that 'Mr. Hughe . . . loyters as much since you went as hee did whilst you weare at home, and seldome comes to praiers at nighte. I see Mr. Foster is troubled at it, the childe good and his engagement soe much beinge at stake, and there being as much tyme spent in play as there is in followinge the Booke . . . instead of going forward, its well yf hee keepe that which hee hath already lerned. Mr. Foster conceaves the way to remidie this is to have the Childe kepte to his Booke as in a tender and lovinge way, soe in some discreete awe too, and yet without any Correction, for hee affirmeth hee enclynes not that way . . .'⁶⁷

When the Civil War began in 1642 Thomas Smyth and his step-father Sir Ferdinando Gorges raised a troop of horse among the gentry of Somerset and Gloucestershire to fight in the royal cause. The two men were both present at a skirmish between the royalists and the parliamentarians at Shepton Mallet in July 1642, and they were both in the royalist force led by the Marquis of Hertford which was besieged in Sherborne castle in September 1642. Compelled by superior parliamentary forces to abandon the castle at Sherborne, the royalists marched to Minehead, and crossed over by ship to Cardiff. Here Thomas Smyth contracted small-pox and died in October 1642. His body was brought back to Long Ashton for burial in the family vault in the parish church by Sir Ferdinando.⁶⁸

It is convenient to end this account of the rise of the Smyths with Thomas. The family had reached a high point in power and influence, a position they were to retain through the next two centuries. Thomas Smyth, with his Oxford education, his great wealth, fine house in the most modern style set in its spacious deer-park, with his jester and twenty-eight other household servants, was a long way removed from the life-style of John Smyth, the hard-working and public spirited Bristol merchant who had founded the family fortune. He was a world apart from the life of Matthew and Thomas Smyth, the 'hoopers', who had arrived in Bristol to seek their fortunes at the end of the fifteenth century.

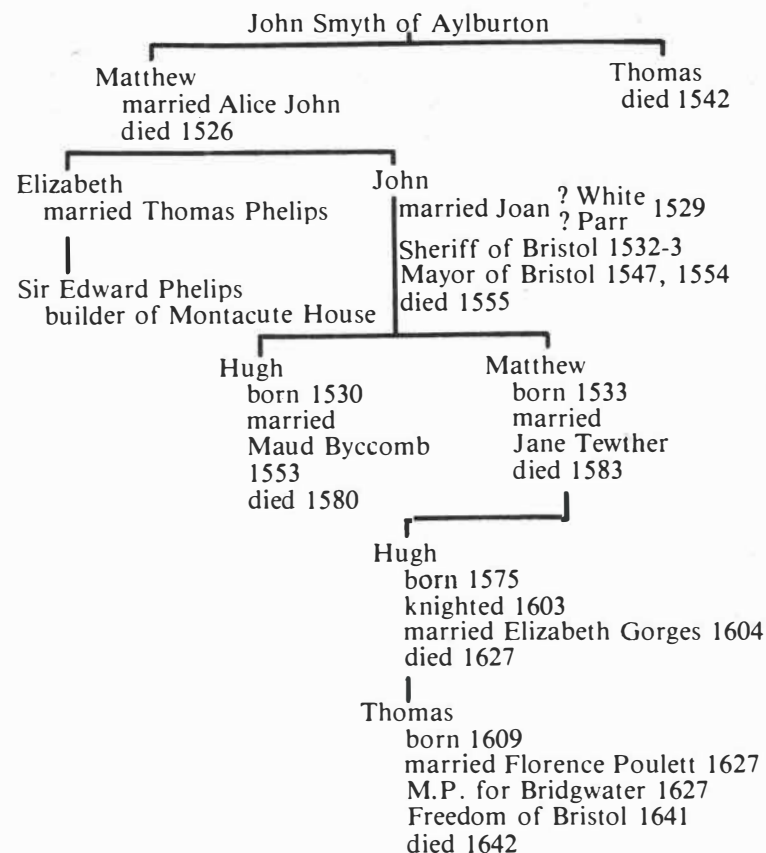
In a short pamphlet it is impossible to describe adequately the wealth of surviving documentary material relating to the early members of the Smyth family, in particular the numerous and informative family letters. These letters are at present being edited for publication in a future volume of the Bristol Record Society.

67. B.R.O. 36074/140c.

68. B.R.O. AC/F1/4; 36074/79. D. Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War and Interregnum*, 1973, pp. 24, 34, 39, 43.

GENEALOGICAL TABLE

The Smyth Family of Long Ashton c1500 — 1642



Note: In order to avoid overloading this table with names, only the main members of the family are shown. The younger and female members in each generation played an important part in cementing alliances with other Somerset families and the Smyths were linked by marriage and other ties to such county families as Phelips, Rodney, Rogers, Horner and Tynte.