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CHARLES GORE: A LINCOLNSHIRE-BORN
HIGH SHERIFF OF RADNORSHIRE

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It is rather surprising to find that in the second half of the 18th century two of the High Sheriffs for Co. Radnor were natives of far-away Lincolnshire—a county both physically and climatically as different from Radnorshire as it is possible for two regions to be in our small island. These two Sheriffs appear in the records as Charles Gore of Divanner, esquire, appointed on 6 February 1771 and Jonathan Field, of Llanbadarn Vynydd, esquire, appointed on 1 February 1779.

Divanner is an old manor house in what is now the parish of Abbey-cwmhir which, like the parish of Llanbadarn Vynydd, was anciently a township with its chapel-of-ease in the extensive 'mother parish' of Llanbister.

Gore and Field must both, of course, have owned land in Co. Radnor to give them qualification for nomination to the office of High Sheriff, but in this article my aim will be to show how such a 'foreigner' as Charles Gore came to be an important landowner in a county so far from his native Lincolnshire, of which rich English county he had in fact been High Sheriff 14 years earlier.

Because the surname 'Gore' is still found in the south-east of Radnorshire, as it was at least as early as the 1670s, though never very commonly, and because it occurs as a place-name in Gore quarry and the nearby Gore chapel, it would be quite wrong to connect these in any way with the Charles Gore who was our High Sheriff in 1771.

He was born in Lincolnshire in the gentry house known as Horkstow Hall, which lay sheltered by low chalk wolds from east winds off the North Sea, and whose nearest town was the old port of Barton-upon-Humber. Charles was the only son among the seven children born to Charles Gore, senior, by his wife, Elizabeth, daughter of Sir James Dolliffe.

From the time of the first Queen Elizabeth the Gores had been prosperous London merchants, specialising in trade with the old Hanseatic ports of north-west Europe. The most successful of them was Sir William Gore, who was a Governor of the Hamburg Company, a founder-director of the Bank of England in 1694 and a one-time Lord Mayor of London. Sir William had four sons, all engaged in business in the City of London as merchants or bankers, and three of them were also Members of Parliament. Charles, the second son, born c. 1685, was 'destined for commerce, according to the custom of those days, when it was, very wisely, no disgrace for the younger sons of the first nobility to seek their fortunes in that line'. Young Charles Gore was eventually placed in charge of the English Factory at Hamburg, being director there when the English and German armies were fighting the French in Germany under the command of the great Duke of Marlborough, who soon recognised Gore's obvious abilities as a government contractor for remittances and for victualling the allied troops.

On the Duke's recall from his military command, the result of the political manoeuvring of his Tory enemies at home, Charles Gore—unlike his brothers—remained a 'Marlborough man'. Indeed, he went so far in his allegiance as to quarrel with his brothers and eventually to leave London and live permanently in the country, where in 1722 he

bought the Lincolnshire estate of Horkstow, in whose 'Hall' was born on 5 December 1729 his third child and only son, named Charles after his father.

Charles Gore the younger was first taught at home by a tutor, who may well have been the Revd Field Dunn, a graduate of St John's College, Cambridge, who was Vicar of Horkstow from 1735 to 1759, at which period the gift of the vicarage was with Charles Gore, senior. In February 1743 young Charles was admitted to Westminster School, where he studied for a few years. While still in his 'teens, he entered the London counting-house of his uncle, John Gore, a wealthy city merchant, who from 1747 to 1761 was M.P. for Great Grimsby, Co. Lincoln. Though disliking it intensely, he persevered in a business career for some years, but as often as possible escaped from the City to visit his parents and friends in their rural Lincolnshire homes. On one such visit, Charles made the acquaintance of a wealthy Scarborough ropemaker's only daughter, Mary Cockerill, a young and strikingly beautiful heiress. They were married in the parish church of St. Mary's Scarborough, then a highly fashionable Yorkshire spa, on 15 August 1751, when Charles was but 21 years old.

Since his wife's marriage portion was some £40,000, Charles Gore quickly abandoned the city career he found so unpleasant and took up residence with his wife at his parents' Horkstow home. Here three daughters were born to them—Elizabeth Maria in 1753, Harriet in 1754 and Emilie in 1755. The death of his father in 1754 left Charles Gore, junior, in possession of the Horkstow estate, two properties in the city of London and a house in or near Hanover Square, then a new and fashionable residential district of Westminster. Although his inheritance was much reduced by his mother's jointure and the legacies left to his four surviving and unmarried sisters, Gore was now able to give free rein to a remarkable mechanical talent 'which he had discovered from his infancy' and which expressed itself mainly in making model ships and in the science of navigation—a talent nurtured no doubt by a boyhood spent close to the Humber estuary, busy then as now with river and sea-going vessels. This enthusiasm for the sea, ships and sailing was further increased when the growing hypochondria of Mrs. Gore resulted in the decision to leave Horkstow for Southampton with its milder winter climate. Thus in the first half of 1759 Gore bought a house—later known from its owner, Captain Ogle, as Ogle House—with an attached close in Above Bar Street in All Saints parish. This house gave the Gores an attractive view westward over Southampton Water whose tidal reaches were even busier than the Humber River.

Before the Gore family moved south, however, two interesting events had occurred—in 1757 Charles Gore was appointed High Sheriff, Co. Lincoln, and in 1758 his wife had given birth to another daughter. She was christened Hannah Anne but not in Horkstow Church, so she may have been born in the Gores' London residence between the time they left Horkstow and their settling in the suburbs of Hampshire's busy port. Mrs. Gore, senior, almost certainly continued to live at Horkstow, because her burial is recorded in its church register on 8 July 1763. Though upon his mother's death, Gore was at liberty to sell his paternal inheritance, a study of the rent returns of the Yarrowborough estate, not a dozen miles from Horkstow, suggests that it was not before 1766 that Gore disposed of his

Horkstow property to Charles Anderson Pelham of Brocklesby, Co. Lincoln, later 1st Baron Yarborough, to whom he was related by reason of the fact that his father's sister, Anne (died 1739) was the first wife of an earlier Charles Pelham.

From 1759 to 1773 the Gores lived close to the historic inlet of the English Channel, and in the words of the short biography of her father written many years later by Emilie Gore, 'Southampton . . . from its vicinity to Portsmouth with its dockyards and to Spithead (the ordinary station of the Fleet) afforded him all he could wish for the study of his favourite object which he indefatigably pursued for the space of ten or twelve years, amusing himself with the construction of different vessels after his own models, one of which (the 'Snail' cutter) remarkable for the elegance of her form and swiftness of her sailing, was well known and admired by the Navy, and Mr. Gore had many times the honour to carry his Majesty's Brothers the Dukes of York, Gloucester and Cumberland in his cutter from Southampton to Spithead, Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight, etc. He generally passed his summers and indeed most of the year in different excursions with the Fleet around the coasts of England, France, the Channel Islands, etc.'

The Autumn of 1773 heralded radical changes in the mode of life of the Gore family, but before describing those changes, let us consider some other happenings of what can be called the Southampton period (1759—1773). We have seen that in or soon after 1766, Gore sold his Horkstow patrimony to a Pelham kinsman of Brocklesby Hall, very possibly to enable him to pay to his four sisters their father's legacy of £2000 apiece, as well as to meet his wife's desire for a new and warmer environment. It was also early in the 1760s that, as we shall see, Gore bought an estate in Radnorshire—for reasons not at first easy to comprehend.

In the only reference to Charles Gore in his *History of Radnorshire*, the Revd Jonathan Williams wrote, 'About the year 1760 one moiety of this great estate (of Abbeycwmhir), including the Manor of Golon, was alienated from the family of Fowler and sold to Charles Gore, esqr., and afterwards purchased by the late John Price, esqr., banker of Penybont in this County'. The Manor of Golon, which included the capital messuage of Divanner, was a large estate extending over parts of four north Radnorshire parishes, yet it was but a part (moiety) of that extensive domain which in the course of three centuries had been built up by successive abbots of Cwmhir. After the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536, the lands of the Abbey of Cwmhir were sold by the Crown to various private persons, and by 1565 the Manor of Golon had become the property of a William Fowler, a member of an old family originating in Co. Stafford, but later domiciled in Harnage Grange in the parish of Cound, Shropshire.

From the stones of the Abbey ruins were built a Chapel-of-ease to serve the local hamlet and, a mile to the east, a Manor House—in Welsh, 'Ty-faenor', but corrupted into Divanner or Divannor. This chapel and manor house are said to have been built by William Fowler, High Sheriff, Co. Radnor in 1695 and High Sheriff Co. Salop in 1712, on whom in 1704 Queen Anne conferred a baronetcy. He was succeeded in 1717 by his son, Richard, a Court favourite, who from 1715 until 1722 represented Radnorshire in the House of Commons. Richard Fowler had in 1706 married Sarah, daughter and heiress of William Sloane, esqr. of Portsmouth and

niece of Sir Hans Sloane, Bart.—a family of Anglo-Irish origin. Though they were proud of their link with the Sloanes, the Fowler family reaped little but trouble from it, since from then onwards the Fowlers, in respect to their Abbeycwmhir estate especially, were bedevilled by family quarrels, most of which led to expensive law-suits and the inevitable impoverishment of the family—an impoverishment intensified by the fact that more than the usual number of jointures, dowries and legacies had to be paid out between 1717 and 1771, during which short period all five Fowler baronets died. Indeed, the financial troubles of the Fowlers became so much a matter of public comment, and even laughter, that in *Notes and Queries* (1881) there appeared a request for the words of a ballad current in Radnorshire in about 1800 describing the experiences of a member of the family of Fowler of Abbeycwmhir during his imprisonment for debt, and thought to be set to the tune of 'I am friar of orders grey'.

In 1708, only two years after their marriage, Richard Fowler and his wife, Sarah, were engaged in chancery proceedings against his parents, Sir William Fowler, 1st Baronet, and Dame Mary, his wife. When Sir William, 3rd Bt., was drowned at sea—probably when the East India Co's vessel 'Winchelsea' was lost with all aboard her early in 1746, he was only 39 years of age, yet probate of his will was finally granted to one Thomas Durston, described as a Creditor, the use of which word might suggest that Sir William was near bankruptcy. If this were so, his attempted voyage to India may have been an effort to escape from legal proceedings. In the will of Sir William Fowler, 4th Bt., who died in Germany on 26 November 1760 aged only 22 and just a few months after joining the army as a Cornet in Sir John Mordaunt's Dragoons, this passage occurs, 'I give . . . to my aunt, Elizabeth Jones of Divannor, widow, £300 in consideration of the loss she sustained by my late father.' This loss might have been money borrowed by the 3rd Baronet (and never repaid) from Elizabeth, sister of his wife, Harriet, daughter of General Newton of Hampton, Salop, or perhaps a legacy due to her which he had failed to pay.

Young Sir Wm. Fowler, 4th Bt., died unmarried and the title passed to his uncle, Hans Fowler (younger and only surviving brother of the 3rd Baronet), who had been an officer in the 21st Foot Regiment and 'sometime an officer in the Prussian Army'. Sir Hans, according to an appendix in the 1905 edition of Williams' *History of Radnorshire*, compiled by Edwin Davies of Brecon, 'engaged in a law suit with his sister, Sarah, who had married Colonel Thomas Hodges, and succeeded in getting the settled portion of the estate. To defray the costs much of the property was sold . . .'. One particular passage in the will, dated 12 July 1770, of Sir Hans Fowler, 5th and last Baronet, reveals not only his own one-time comparative poverty but the bitterness of the Fowler family quarrels; it runs, 'And whereas I am convinced I have been greatly deceived and imposed upon by the artful contrivances and misrepresentations of my sister Sarah Hodges and Mr. Lawrence her attorney and solicitor who, by taking advantage of my then distressed and indigent circumstances, have together with or in the connivance of my late mother, Dame Sarah Fowler otherwise Annesley, drawn me to execute sundry agreements bearing date 15 August 1761 for the settlement of the inheritance of the jointure estate, then in the possession of

this passage, 'His beloved wife died at Spa on 22 August 1785. Her remains were transported to her native country by order of her husband who learned this fatal intelligence while suffering under a violent attack of the gout at Shobdon Court . . . the house of his friend, Lord Bateman, whose kind attentions, with those of Lady Bateman, afforded him all the consolation his misfortune could admit of.'

Evidence that Gore spent some little time in Radnorshire—though possibly from a base in Shobdon Court—comes from the Order Book of the Radnorshire Turnpike Trust, now deposited in the National Library of Wales. The first meeting of this Trust was held on 4 August 1767 in the Town Hall at Presteigne, and the record shows the adjacent signatures of 'Bateman' and 'Charles Gore'. Gore's signature appears next on 24 October 1767, on which day he also 'qualified himself by the oath required by the General Turnpike Act.' His signature never appears again, though this is no sure proof that he attended no more meetings of the Trust, because rarely did all of those present sign the Order Book.

Further evidence of Gore's involvement in Radnorshire affairs is the fact that he was a Commissioner for the Land Tax in Radnorshire, the meetings—almost certainly at Presteigne—being between May and November, 1768. Other Commissioners for Co. Radnor in that year were Lord Bateman, Sir Hans Fowler, Jonathan Field, Howell Gwynne, Edward Lewis (of Downton), John Lewis (of Harpton), Chase Price and indeed most of the leading landowners of the county. That Charles Gore was a Trustee of the Radnorshire Turnpike in 1767 and a Commissioner for the Land Tax in Co. Radnor in 1768 shows that the new Lord of the Manor of Golon was taking an active interest in his adopted county.

This being so, it is perhaps surprising that Charles Gore's name had not been put forward as one of the three 'persons proper to be High Sheriff for the year ensuing' before 11 November 1770 when, with David Davies of Glascombe, esqr. and Harford Jones of Presteigne, esqr., he was nominated to the Lords of his Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council, as 'Charles Gore of Divanner, esqr.' His Majesty George III pricked the name of Gore to act as High Sheriff as from 6 February 1771 for the next twelve months. As its High Sheriff, Gore could only with great difficulty have avoided being present at Presteigne on the occasions of the Assizes to welcome, entertain and accompany to the parish church for divine service either His Majesty's then Chief Justice for Radnorshire, John Williams, or the Second Justice, William Whittaker. In this context, it is interesting to note that, Sir Hans Fowler of Abby Cwmhire, Bart.' (*sic*) was nominated on the morrow of St. Martin's (11th November) 1764 for the first time and also pricked to act as High Sheriff for Co. Radnor from 1 February 1765—possibly an indication that he had by late 1764 brought his dispute with his sister, Sarah (Mrs. Hodges), to a successful conclusion.

Being described as 'of Divanner' should not be taken as proof that Gore actually lived in the old Manor House near the ruined Cwmhir Abbey, except rarely on some important business occasions connected with the Manor of Golon when it was essential for Gore to have discussions with his Steward. Gore was a gentleman of wealth and refinement with a residence in Southampton and a London house in the fashionable Hanover Square district. His family moved in the highest social circles, and Gore himself, as we have seen, was on terms of friendship with royal dukes. Charles Gore, it is perhaps fair to state, considered his Manor of Golon as



CHARLES Gore. Plaster bust by C. G. Weißer (1807).

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