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King Charles II visit to Charmouth in 1651

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THE WEB FRESHFORD SITE



I have been fascinated by the gentleman who planned and nearly succeeded in the attempt to assist King Charles II in his Escape to France. His name was William Ellesdon and both he and his descendants were to dominate the lives of villagers for nearly 150 years. I have tried to build up a picture of Charmouth during this turbulent chapter in the country's history from the limited records that have survived. The year before the Civil war began in 1641, Parliament decreed that all males over 18 should take a Protestation (declaration of loyalty) Oath . All names were listed and anyone who refused to take it was recorded. Seventy five gentleman were to sign it in Charmouth, which has shown to equate to an approximate total population of 250. In the same year there was an order that the hundred of Whitchurch and the tithings of Hawkchurch and Dalwood were ordered to contribute £ 10 per year to the Poor Rates of Charmouth -"where there are many poor people whom the parish cannot relieve".

A further insight into the state of the village can be seen in the comprehensive survey carried out by Sir William Petre when he purchased it from the Queen a century before . The original document survives in Devon Record Office and clearly shows that the majority of his tenants occupied cottages along the Street with an acre of land and a further acre of common land which they farmed. There were a number of people who had larger holdings, the most prominent of whom were the Limbrys. A branch of this family lived in what is today's Charmouth House, but then known as The Fountain. It was one of a number of hostelryes along the Street that served travellers using the London to Exeter road that passed through the village. A descendant of this family, Stephen Limbry was to feature as the seaman in the attempted escape of King Charles II. A contemporary road map by John Ogilby shows the village with its main Street lined with houses and the paths to the sea, now Lower Sea Lane and Barr ' s Lane which led to Wootton Fitzpaine.

At the beginning of the Civil War the village was mainly owned by Sir John Pole. He had sided with Parliament and in 1643 he twice helped to lead anti-royalist raids in Devon and Cornwall. However, he also participated in abortive local peace negotiations that year. His position in Devon was complicated by his son William's decision to fight for the king, and both Colcombe Castle and Shute Barton were badly damaged during the war, by royalist and parliamentarian forces respectively. He was active in local government but he evidently disapproved of Charles I's execution as he declined to serve under the Commonwealth, despite being retained on the Devon bench. He died in April 1658, and was buried at Colyton, where he had erected a lavish monument to himself and his first wife. Although he was to sell the Manor of Charmouth to William Ellesdon in 1648, he retained The Mill and 35 acres of land in the village, which was eventually to be sold by his descendants at the end of the 18th. Century.

William Ellesdon in contrast to Sir John Pole was a staunch Royalist. No doubt his father, Anthony held the same sympathies and in buying the adjoining Newlands with its fine house, Stonebarrow Manor, the following year was making a hasty departure from Lyme Regis, where he had been Mayor no less than three times. This town had always held an independent stance and was known as a Parliamentarian strong hold. This culminated in the famous Siege of 1644, when for 8 weeks they withstood the forces of Prince Maurice, who eventually abandoned his attempt. Loyalties to each side existed within families and it is interesting to see who William's brother, John supported, for there is a later letter from Col. Robert Mohun "setting forth articles against John Ellesden, who was put into the place of Collector of Customs of Lyme by Cromwell".

The Ellesdons were originally successful merchants from Lyme Regis and were regularly Mayors of the borough. The Church still has a brass shield which extols them and records 4 generation being buried in their vault. Coincidentally the last is Anthony, father of William Ellesdon the central character to this article who is shown as dying in 1655. This same gentleman purchased the Manor of Newlands, which today forms part of Charmouth in 1649. The family lived in a large house in Church Street, near where the famous George Inn stood. It was here that William and his brother John were to be bought up by their parents Grace and Anthony. John's life was to be spent in Lyme Regis where he was to eventually become its Mayor in 1659 and with his wife Sarah Clapcott have four children, John, Grace, Mary, Thomas. The latter was to briefly unite the two branches of the family by marrying his cousin Mary in 1726, who by then was a widow on the death of her husband, Richard Henvill.

William Ellesdon was a Royalist and held the position of Captain and later Colonel in the army and was to risk his life in support of the King. For that would have been his fate if charged for assisting in his escape. It must have been a miracle that he was able to remain a free man until his return. He had been earlier successful in assisting Lord Berkley escape across to France after the Battle of Worcester and no doubt would have repeated this with Charles, if Stephen Limbry had not returned home to his angry wife. But King Charles was to give him a gold coin when he briefly spent the night before the planned escape at a house his father owned at Monkton Wyld, still called Elsdons. At the same time he promised that when he regained his throne he would reward him handsomely. His Majesty, on his restoration visited the village and granted to him and two successive heirs a pension of £ 300 per annum, and presented him with a medal bearing the inscription "Faithful to the Horns of the Altar". The King also gives a beautiful miniature by Samuel Cooper of Ellesdon, together with a pair of silver candlesticks. He was also presented with a coat of arms, which can be seen today on their marble memorial in St. Andrews and on a large plaque commemorating his son's later improvements to the church.

The pension was for both him and his immediate family and would be derived from taxes received from the port of Lyme Regis. There is a website called british history online that has a huge database covering parliamentary records and almost yearly there are references to those benefitting from his pension and through this I have been able to obtain important information about the family. Most intriguing was £ 1000 he was to receive in 1663 for his work for the King's Secret Service. Unfortunately the money was often not forthcoming and there are pleas from his family for these outstanding payments. It shows that he died in 1684, the year before the Monmouth Rebellion, but his pension was to continue to be received by his wife, Joanne and children - Anthony, Charles, Mary and Anne. It was his eldest son Anthony who was to take over his role and live in what was the largest house in the village opposite the Church, where he lived for almost 80 years. Little is known about him apart from the charitable work that he did that is recorded on the impressive marble monument erected by his niece's husband, Richard Henvill who inherited his estate. He no doubt had the same loyalty as his father to King Charles II, as he was still receiving a pension of £ 100 a year as a result of his support.

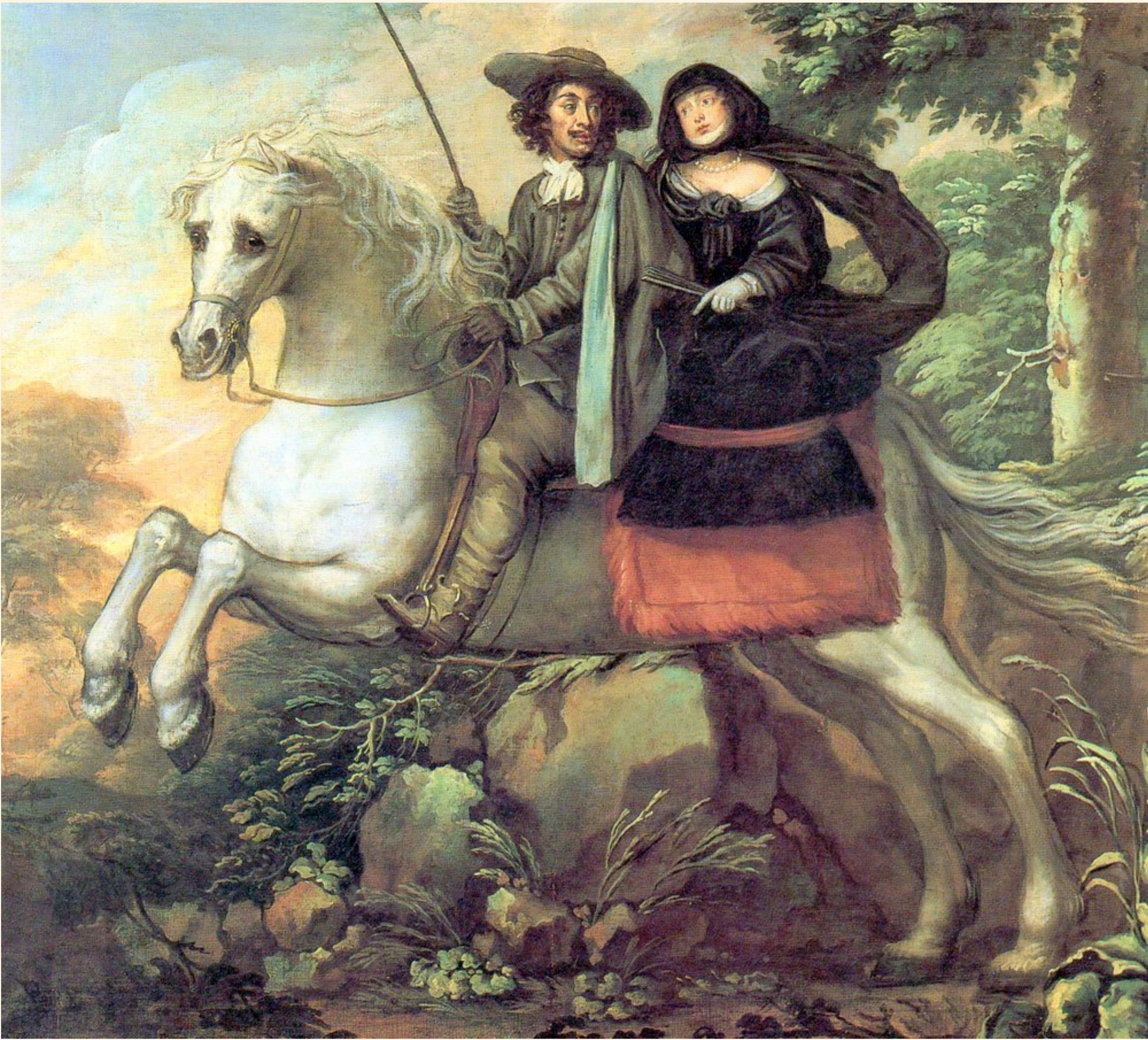




King Charles II



The Oak Tree at Boscable



Escape

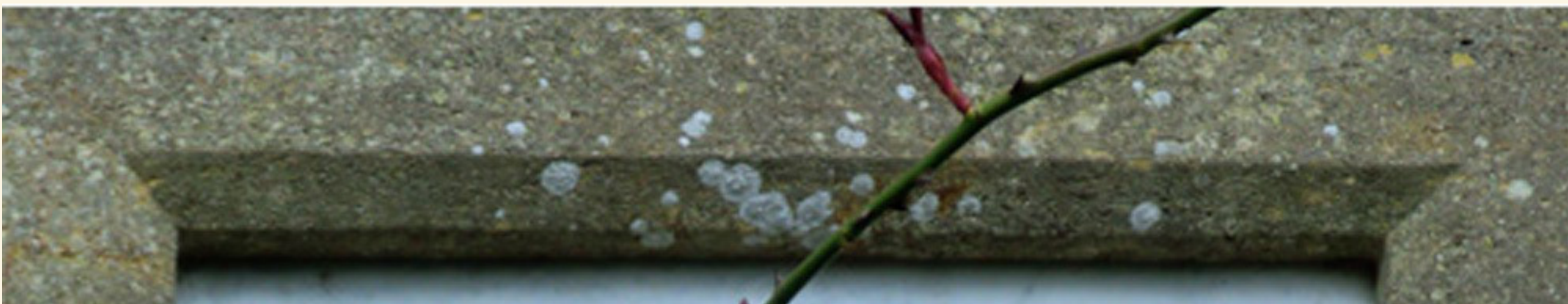




Trent



Elsdons Monkton Wylde



KING CHARLES II.
STAYED HERE
SEPTEMBER 22. 1651.
ERECTED MARCH 3. 1902.

The plaque above the window near the entrance to Elsdons Farmhouse which was occupied by a tenant of John, brother of William Ellesdon, signifying that on September 22nd 1651, Charles II stayed here before entering Charmouth in an attempt to leave the shore there and flee to St Omer in France. On the death of Anthony, son of William Ellesdon in 1737, the estates passed to his nephew Richard Henvill, but the name, though shortened continued being used both for the farm and the Lane that passes it on the way to the centre of Monkton Wyld. The farm was owned with the village and many other farms by Viscount Bridport. In 1895 all his houses and lands which extended to over 5,500 acres were sold by auction. The plaque is one of a number in the area which were placed on building associated with the Escape of king Charles II in 1651.



In the seventeenth century The Abbots House was an inn, patronised by cavaliers and here King Charles II stayed whilst waiting for Stephen Limbry to take him to France. A ham stone chimney piece with the initials C.R. was put up after the Restoration, which was covered over with plaster sometime after 1815.



Abbots House Hotel in the Street in Charmouth today



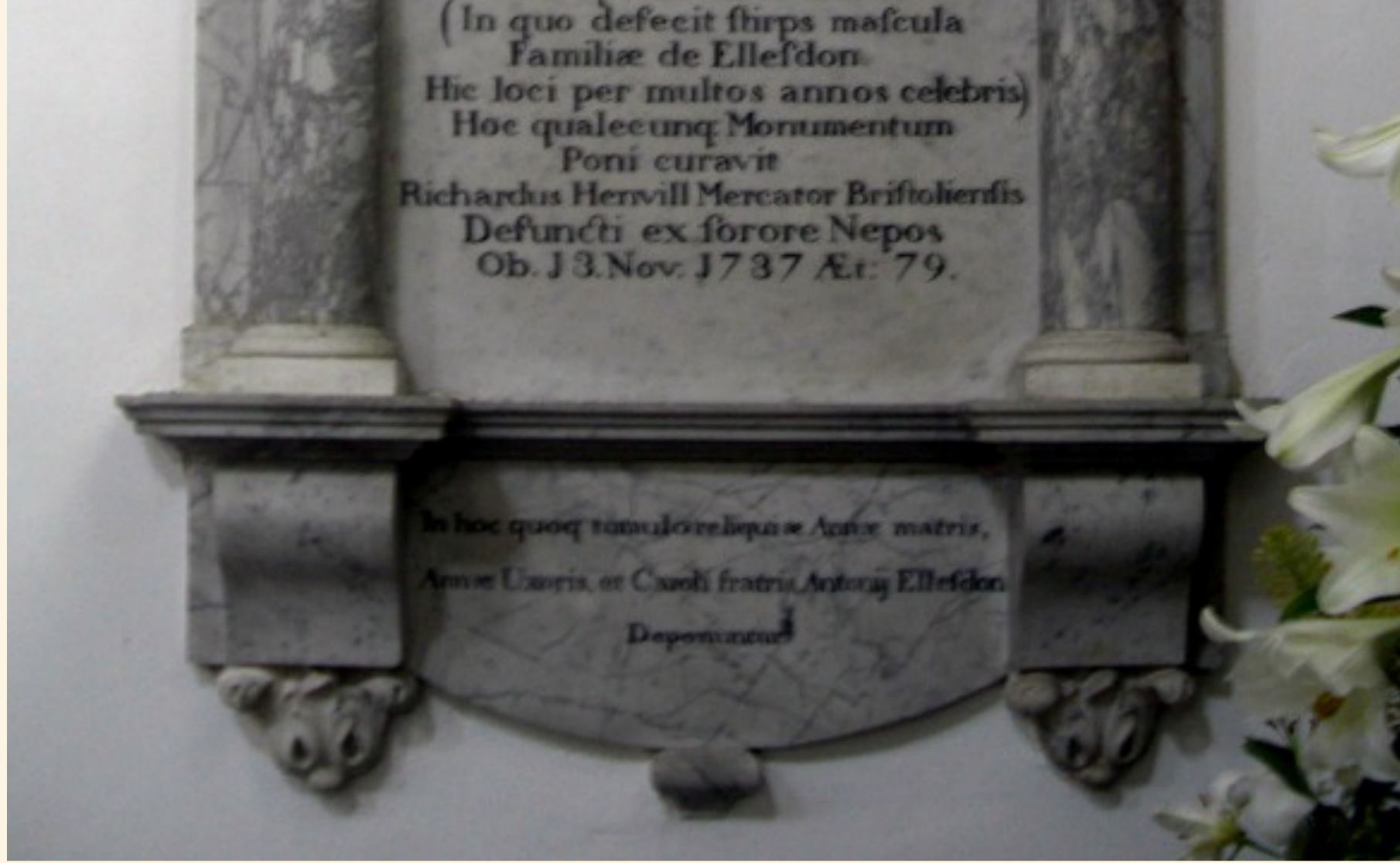
ERECTED MARCH 31. 1902.

The plaque above the entrance doorway at Abbots House









William Ellesdon, who subsequently furnished Lord Clarendon with the detailed account of his share in the events of September 22-3, 1651, had two sons, Anthony (born 1658) and Charles (the latter, born on June, 1661, named after the King). Anthony Ellesdon lived till 13 November, 1737, having survived his brother Charles thirty-two years. There is a monument to him in St. Andrews Church at Charmouth, removed from the older building. His mother and wife as well as his brother Charles were buried in the same vault with Anthony.



William Ellesdon of Lyme Regis purchased the manor in 1649. On his death, Anthony his son, who was born in Charmouth in 1659, was to become Lord of the Manor. He certainly lived in the Manor House, opposite St. Andrews Church. It was not as we see it today as the eastern part being added later. Anthony Ellesdon, according to the record on his memorial in the church, was a great benefactor to the village, and there are a number of memorials to him, the most magnificent is the marble tablet commemorating his life.



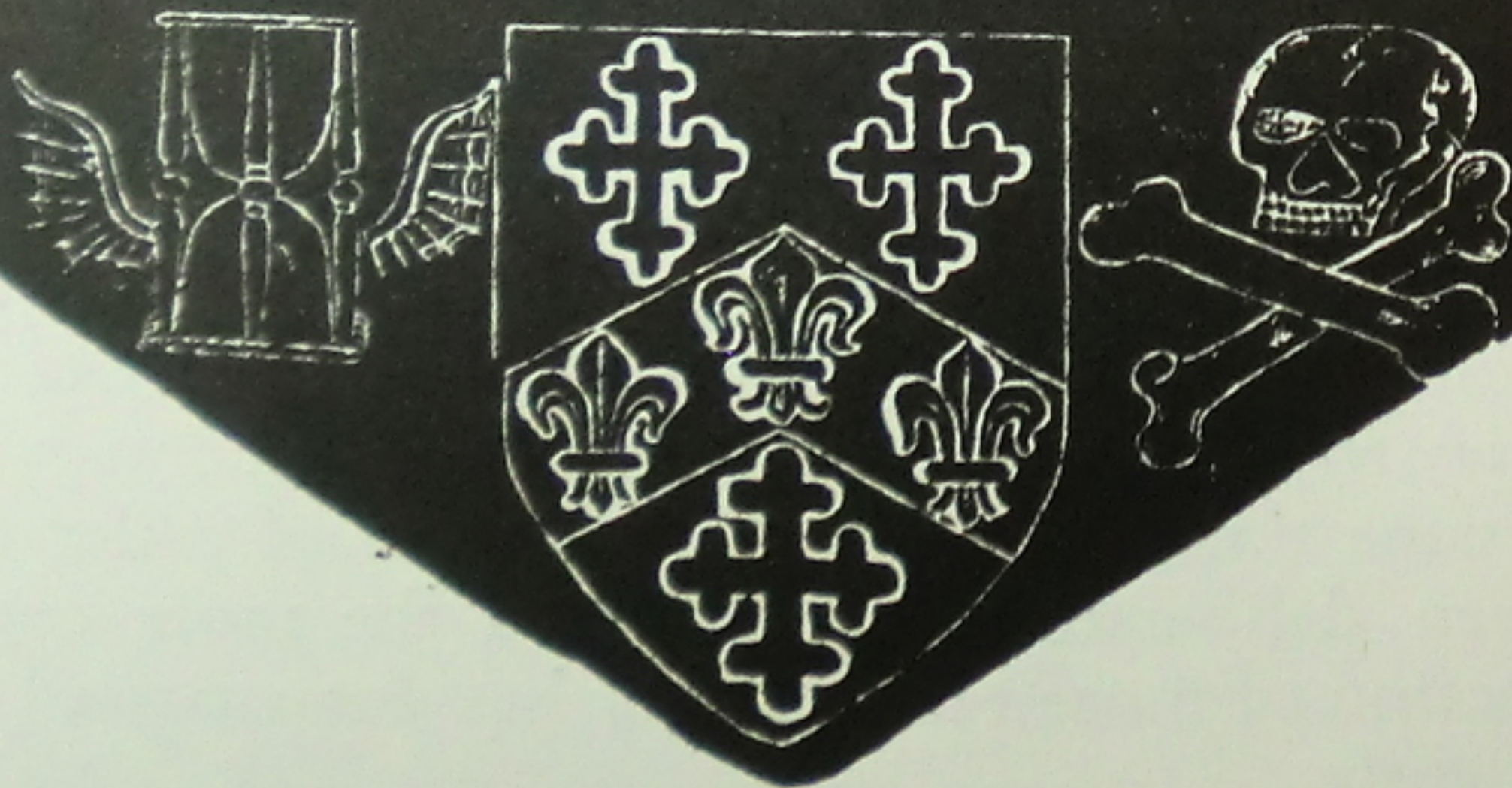


Anthony son of William Ellesdon was a benefactor to the church, as appears by an inscription in St. Andrews, "Re-edified and beautified by Anthony Ellesdon. Esq. 1732"



HERE LYETH BVRYED THE BODY OF RALPH ELLEDON OF
LYME REGIS GENTLEMAN, ALLSO HERE LYETH BVRYED THE
BODY OF THOMAS SON OF THE SAYD RALPH, ALLSO HE:
RE LYETH BVRYED THE BODY OF WILLIAM SON OF THE
SAYD THOMAS, ALLSO HERE LYETH BVRYED THE BODY OF AN:
THONY, SON OF THE SAYD WILLIAM, WHICH SAYD ANTHONY
DECEASED THE 12TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER 1655

MEN PIOUS IVST AND WISE, EACH MANY A YEERE
THE HELME OF THIS TOWNE'S GOVERMENT DID STEERE
BEYOND BASE ENVIOUS REACH, WHOSE ENDLES NAME
LIVES IN ALL THOSE THAT EMVLATE THEIR FAME.

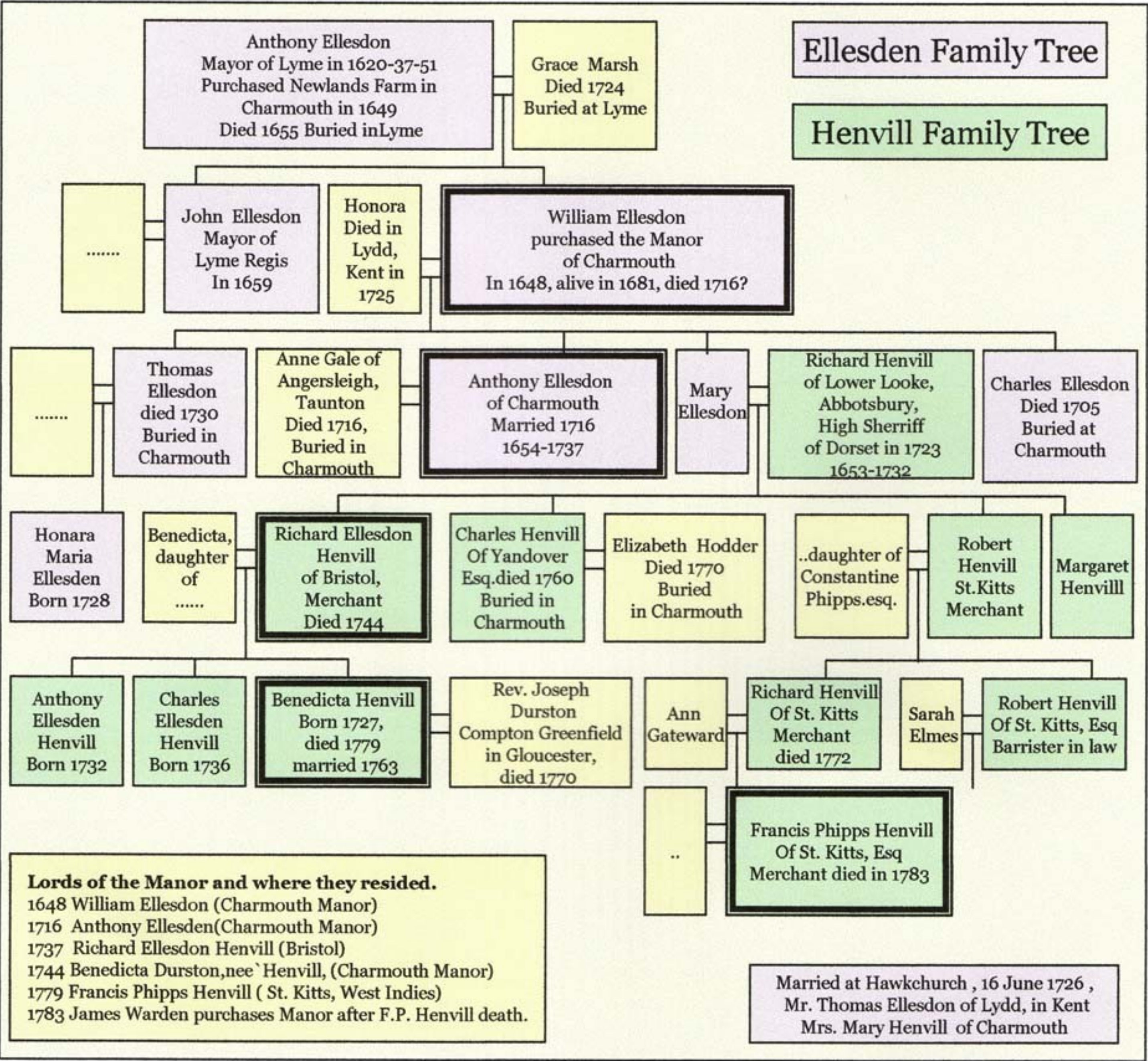


Members of the Ellesdon family were Mayors of Lyme Regis seven times between 1521 and 1651, in which year Anthony Ellesdon held the office. In the ancient and interesting church of Lyme Regis is a brass in memory of four of them with the family arms and the lines: "Men pious just & wise, each many a yeere The helme of this towne's government did steere Beyond base envious reach, whose endless name Lives in all those that emulate their fame."





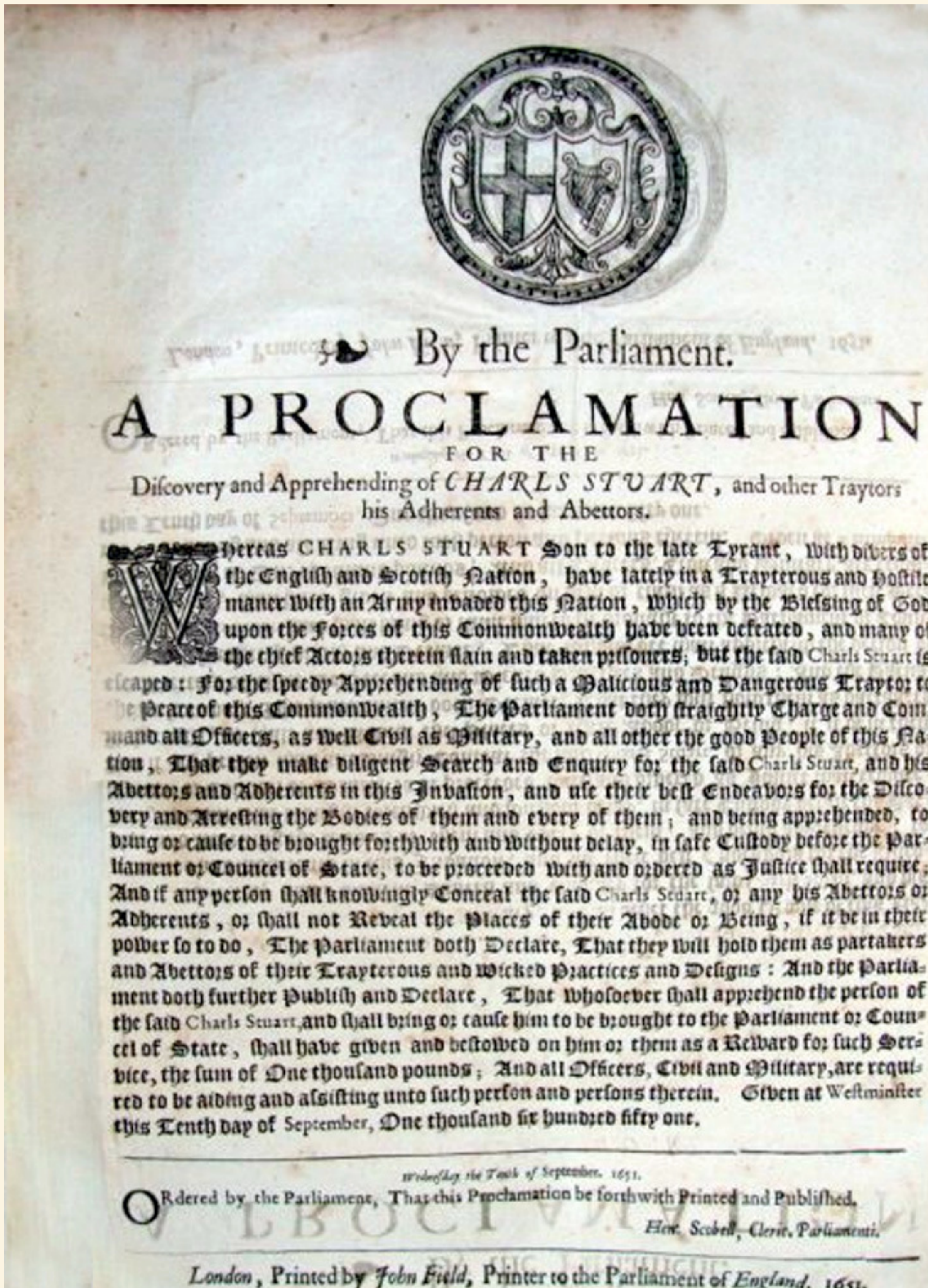
The Descent of of the Manor of Charmouth in the Ellesden Family from 1648 until 1783



[f.63.] Charmouth Tithinge 63 modo 64

William Ellesdon vj Benjamin Bird ij John Davie j Thomas Holman ij Edward
Melpley j Petervell Minterne ij Christofer Humby iij George Wade v Judith Miller ij
Willm' Limbry iij Thomas Edwardes j Willm' Hinde iij John Cade j Robert Cox iij
Elizabeth Melpley ij John Defcoate iij [f.63d.] John Osborne j Stephen Edwardes ij
Robert Tanner j Hugh Cox ij Robert Way iij John Checkley j William Cox j Vrsula
Woode j Edward Mable iij Stephen Limbry j John Bartram j Nichas' Wolmanton j
Richard Baily j Andrew Lymbry iij

The Hearth Tax of 1664 for Charmouth shows William Ellesdon having the largest house, The Manor, opposite St. Andrews Church, with 6 Hearths. Lower down in the list is Stephen Limbry, who was to assist in the escape of the King with just 1 hearth. William Lymbry with 4 hearth, probably his brother is known to have been living in what is now Charmouth House at the junction of Higher Sea lane and the Street



A "Wanted" poster similar to this would no doubt have been seen by Stephen Limbry's wife after her visit to the market in Lyme Regis the same day. It was issued by Oliver Cromwell offering a reward for Charles II's capture of £1,000. It was to make her suspicious of her husband's actions and as a consequence she was to lock him in their house so that he could not meet the King on the beach at the allotted hour.



The Royal Oak in Charmouth today with its hanging sign recording the Escape of Charles II





The hanging sign at the Royal Oak in Charmouth





A print showing king Charles after the restoration returning in glory.



William Ellesdon, Lord of the Manor of Charmouth must have been held in high regard by King Charles as he almost succeeded in assisting in the escape of King Charles II to France after the battle of Worcester. William had formerly been a Captain for the Royalists who had since become a successful Merchant. He had assisted in the escape of Lord Berkeley to France and it was for this reason that Colonel Wyndham recommended him to the King to assist in his escape.

The King left his refuge at Trent, south of Dorchester and was to stay overnight with John, brother of William Ellesdon at his house at Monkton Wylde which still stands today and is known as Elsdon`s Farmhouse. He was then going on to Charmouth where a boat would be waiting to take him to France and safety. Unfortunately the scheme backfired when the wife of the boat man, Stephen Lymbry, found out and locked him in a room in their house. As a result the future king had to spend a night at what is now the "Abbots House" in the Street, before travelling on to Bridport. This event was to put Charmouth on the map forever more and our own William Ellesden in a long letter tells the story in vivid detail to Lord Clarendon of his part in the story, which is shown below.

In reward for Captain Ellesdon`s services and loyalty, his Majesty, on his restoration visited the village on July 2, 1671 and granted to him and two successive heirs a pension of £300 per annum. He was presented with a medal bearing the inscription "faithful to the horns of the Altar". The King also gave him a beautiful miniature by Samuel Cooper, together with a pair of silver candlesticks, which are believed to be in the West Indies, when descendants settled there.

In the years 1681-3, the Mayor of Lyme Regis, Captain Gregory Alford, showed much energy in the persecution of Dissenters and accused William Ellesden of conniving in the proceedings of conventicle preachers. There is a letter dated February 18th 1681 where Ellesden writes in his defence that: *He has no power in Lyme and is not a magistrate of the borough. He lives at Charmouth 11/2 miles away, but is willing to execute the laws under dissenters. He goes on to say that Captain Gregory Alford did read his letter to every person he did meet with in the street, to men, women & Children, by which means, having notice of it, did avoid the apprehension. He wishes for an order to*

arrest John Brice a conventicle preacher in Charmouth. He has no jurisdiction in Lyme

More than a year later William Ellesden was still living, for on July 7 1683, the Bishop of Bristol complains of his *discouraging the King's information against unlawful Conventicle meetings, allaying that he refused to give to the poor of the parish, & gave always to every preacher that was convicted*. Ellesdon at that time was over 60. He was born in 1620 and purchased the Manor of Charmouth in 1648. He was no doubt still Lord of the Manor of Charmouth in 1685 when the Duke of Monmouth passed the shores of the village on his way to Lyme Regis. It is interesting to read that by 1689 his heirs petitioned the House of Commons for the payment of the arrears due of the pension granted him on account of the assistance he gave King Charles in 1651.

The visit of Charles II in 1671, when he rode over from Lyme to Charmouth, the nearby village, where he had a narrow escape from capture in 1651. This is the only known occasion on which he went back to the actual theatre of youthful perils and adventures incurred in the days when he was a fugitive. And yet this visit was not intentional. On the King's return to Portsmouth in 1671, after a naval tour of inspection, he was driven into Lyme by stress of weather, and in those days of sailing ships the West Bay with its Chesil Bank was justly a terror to sailors in a South West gale. Having landed at Lyme, Charles bethought him of Charmouth, thereby avoiding (among other possible drawbacks of his enforced stay) the intrusive attentions of Lyme's superheated local jingo, Gregory Alford (folio 26). The king rode out of Lyme, to a salvo of guns from the forts, by Mill Green and Colway Lane, up Charmouth Hill (when the guns went off again), and so on by the old Roman road past the golf links to Charmouth. He had three western magnates in attendance—a Courtenay, a Rolle, and an Acland. All these things are set out in figures taken from accounts of the town. Of what he did when at Charmouth we know nothing, but he would have wanted no one to jog his memory as to the excitements of twenty years ago. **an extract from Lyme Leaflets -Cyril Wanklyn**

An extract from Where Dorset meets Devon by Francis Bickley 1911

King Charles II had got safe to Trent, near Sherborne. The matter was to get him out of England, for his enemies were following every scent. One design had already come to nothing, when Colonel Wyndham, his Majesty's host, bethought him of a certain Captain William Ellesden of Lyme, who had had a hand in getting Sir John Berkeley over the sea. Wyndham went to Lyme, found Ellesden and told his story, taking the precaution, however, to name only Lord Wilmot as concerned in the adventure. Ellesden, a staunch loyalist, readily promised his aid. He brought the colonel to Charmouth to a tenant of his, Stephen Limbry, who agreed for a fee of sixty pounds to have a boat in readiness in Charmouth roads at a given date and to conduct the party, of whose names and rank he was, of course, ignorant, safely to France.

The preliminaries settled, Wyndham's next concern was to get the king to Charmouth, and also to provide that his midnight departure should not arouse suspicions. He sent his servant, Henry Peters, to the *Queen's Arms*; and Peters, over a glass of wine, told the landlady, a sentimental soul, a gallant story of how his master loved a lady of Devon, and she him again, how stern parents thwarted their desires, and of how the lovers had decided for an elopement. He then arranged that the best room in the inn should be theirs for the appointed evening, though they would not sleep there but leave in the small hours of the following morning.

The day came. Julia Coningsby, Lady Wyndham's niece, rode postillion behind the King. The Colonel accompanied them, while Lord Wilmot and the man Peters followed at some distance, as though unconnected. The King masqueraded as William Jackson. On the way they called at the house of Captain Ellesden's brother, where Charles made himself known to the captain and gave him a piece of gold " in which, in his solitary hours, he made a hole to put a ribbon in.

Then the party went on to Charmouth to wait for Limbry. They waited. A serious hitch had occurred in that well-intentioned seaman's plans. His wife, uninformed of his project, and suspicious of his secrecy, had locked him in his room, where she kept him until morning. Meanwhile the anxious Royalists had sent a message to Ellesden, who advised a prompt departure from Charmouth. So, thwarted once more, they rode on to Bridport.

Ellesden's advice was wise. Suspicion had been aroused in other breasts besides the flinty Mrs. Limbry's. The King's horse had needed shoeing and the smith, Hammet, a man who knew his trade, noticed that the beast had been shod in three separate shires, and that one of the three was Worcestershire, the county in all men's thoughts. The ostler at the *Queen's Arms*, already in a state of curiosity about these strange gentlemen who had kept their horses saddled all night, went off at once to Mr. Wesley, the minister. But the parson was praying, and prayed so long that the ostler could not wait for the "Amen." When Wesley was at last told the news, Charles and his friends were well on the Bridport road.

This Mr. Wesley, who was great grandfather of the founder of Methodism, was a dry man who loved not romance. He favoured the roundhead cause and would gladly have apprehended the fugitive king. It was in an ill and sarcastic temper that he walked into the *Queen's Arms* Inn that morning. " Why, how now, Margaret! " he greeted the landlady. " You are a maid of honour now." " What mean you by that, Mr. Parson? " quoth she. " Why, Charles Stuart lay last night at your house, and kissed you at his departure; so that now you can't be but a maid of honour." Margaret fired up. " If I thought it was the King," she retorted, " I would think the better of my lips all the days of my life, and so you, Mr. Parson, get out of my house." So poor Mr. Wesley retired, but it was lucky for Mistress Margaret that those were not the days of the Bloody Assizes.

At Bridport Charles put up at the *George*. Here again he was all but discovered. The place was full of soldiers and servants. The King, himself acting in the latter capacity, must mingle with the crowd in the yard. An ostler greeted him with puzzled recognition, and but for that ready wit of the Stuart's it is probable that his disguise would have been pierced. Anyway, another move was thought advisable. So the party took a by-road to Broadwindsor, where once more they found themselves in an inn-parlour full of soldiers. Fate seemed fighting for the roundheads, but an unexpected ally appeared in the person of a young woman, in the excitement of whose sudden travail the strangers were forgotten. Their next move was back to Trent