

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

Bristol's Second Sugar House

by I. V. Hall
1949, Vol. 68, 110-164

© The Society and the Author(s)

JOHN KNIGHT, JUNIOR, SUGAR REFINER AT THE
GREAT HOUSE ON ST. AUGUSTINE'S BACK

(1654-1679)

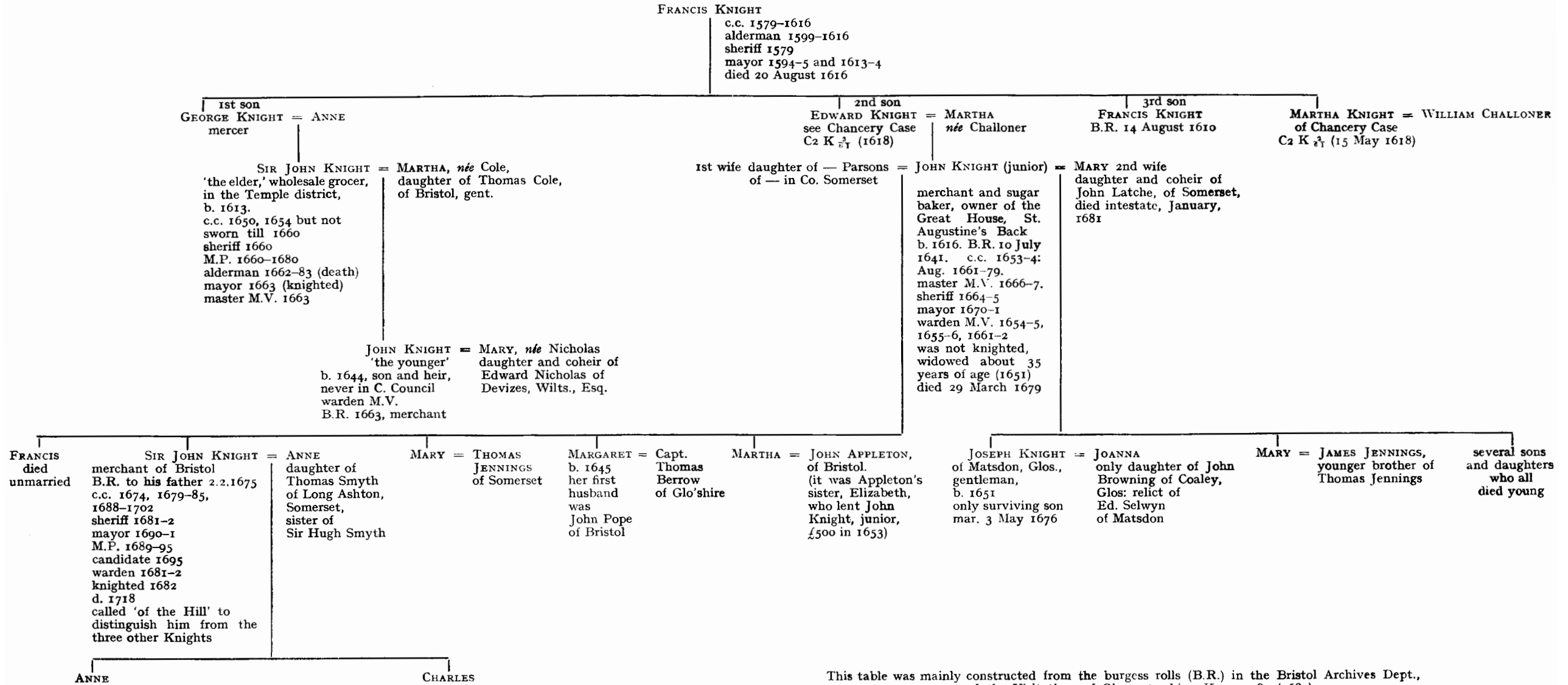
BRISTOL'S SECOND SUGAR HOUSE

by I. V. HALL, M.A., F.R.HIST.S.

JOHN KNIGHT was born in 1616, and died in 1679, at the ripe age of 63, well above the average for an Englishman in the 17th century. By the year of his birth the first sugar house in Bristol had just been opened at St. Peter's Churchyard (1612-1696), and by the year of his death, Bristol had established itself as a centre of the sugar industry with five flourishing refineries. But whereas Bristol's first sugar house had been founded to refine Portuguese cane sugars from the Azores, the Madeiras and Brazil, John Knight's refinery on St. Augustine's Back, was established to absorb English sugar imports from Barbadoes, Nevis, Montserrat and St. Kitts. Both houses, though separated in time by a generation, were pioneering ventures. St. Peter's remained the sole representative of the pre-West Indian phase of Bristol's sugar trade; St. Augustine's was the first of a second series of refineries which were specifically associated with English enterprise in the West Indies.

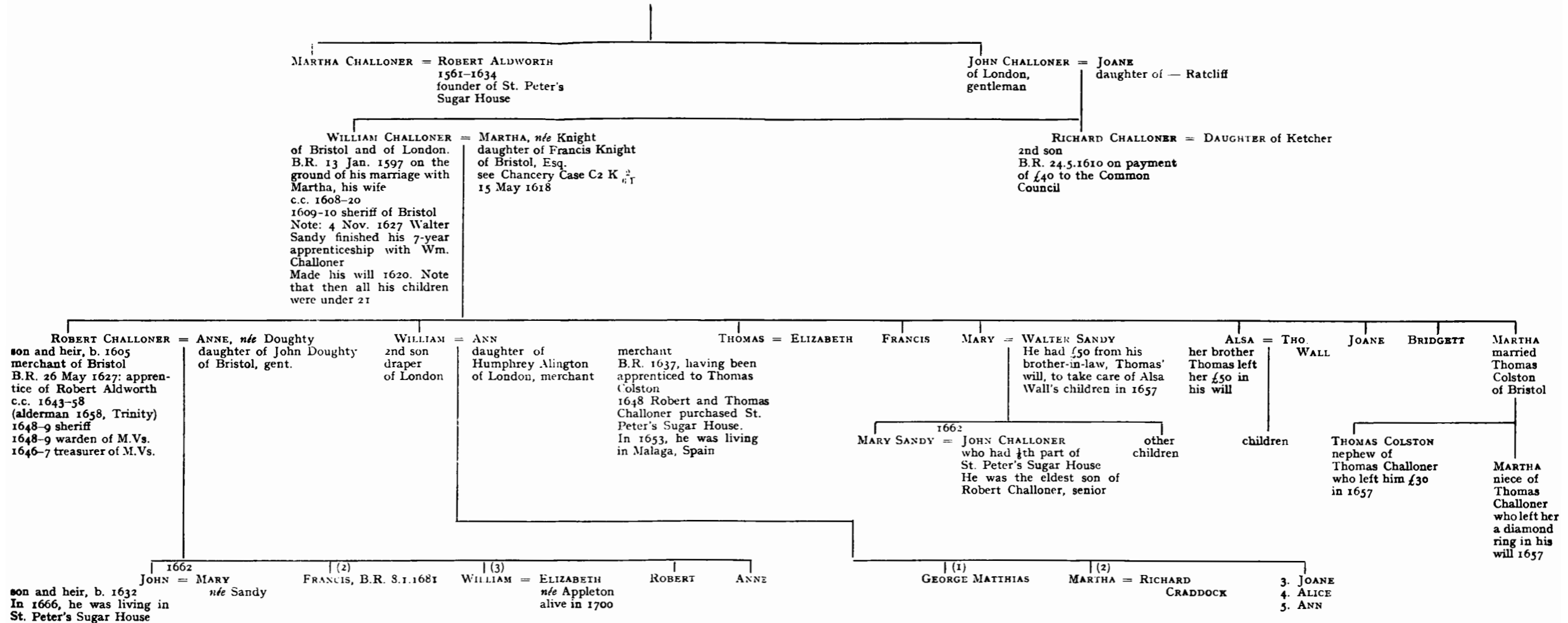
Knight's importance in the history of the local sugar trade was manifold. Through his parents, he was brought into contact with the principal undertakings in the city; by family tradition, he was led into service in local politics; by his own initiative, he integrated both sections of his business—the one in Bristol and the other in the West Indian islands—by employing his friends as managers in the sugar house, and by sending his near relations to act as his agents on his plantation in Nevis. By staying at home, Knight formed the connecting link in the general scheme. Moreover, by a profitable use of his leisure

KNIGHT PEDIGREE



This table was mainly constructed from the burgess rolls (B.R.) in the Bristol Archives Dept., and the Visitations of Gloucestershire, K5, p. 180 (1683).

CHALLONER PEDIGREE



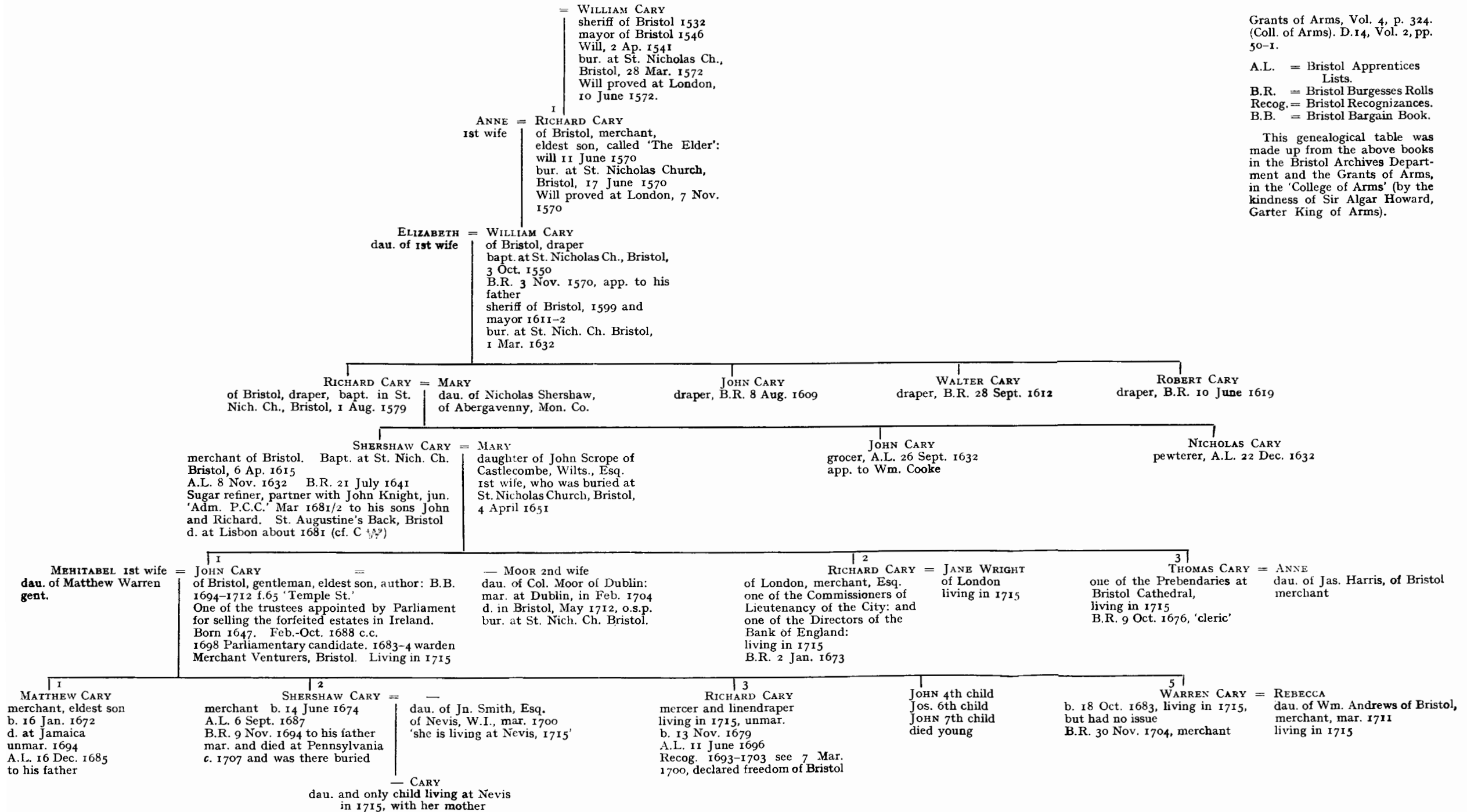
This table is mainly constructed from the burgess rolls (B.R.) in the Bristol Archives Dept. and the 1683 Visitation of Gloucestershire: D 27, p. 120 and N. XI 28 College of Arms

CARY PEDIGREE

Grants of Arms, Vol. 4, p. 324.
(Coll. of Arms). D.14, Vol. 2, pp.
50-1.

A.L. = Bristol Apprentices
Lists.
B.R. = Bristol Burgesses Rolls
Recog. = Bristol Recognizances.
B.B. = Bristol Bargain Book.

This genealogical table was
made up from the above books
in the Bristol Archives Depart-
ment and the Grants of Arms,
in the 'College of Arms' (by the
kindness of Sir Algar Howard,
Garter King of Arms).



time, he established his own contacts among the Merchant Venturers, City Councillors and Aldermen. A link with the past, he nevertheless played his part in promoting Bristol's prosperity in her own trade relations with the Americas and the West Indies, at a time when Bristol was striving to find a place in the sun after the depression of the Civil Wars. Knight gained a name of pioneer in this respect by founding an industry which is associated with the Commonwealth rather than the subsequent Stuart period.

To study Knight's career in detail is fascinating because it reflects the major issues of his day and generation—the political and religious storms that wrapped his fortunes from the cradle to the grave. In early youth (1634–1641, the years of his apprenticeship in Bristol) he witnessed the adverse effects of early Stuart policy on his native city and resolved to renounce the career as merchant which his forebears had followed from late Tudor times. Instead he took up farming in East Anglia during the early years of the Civil War.

The second stage in his career (1643–1653) began with the purchase of some 700 acres of land under the Fen Drainage Scheme. He then sought a fortune among the Puritan farmers, from whom apparently he imbibed the religious practices and precepts which made an abiding impression on him throughout life. It was during this decade that he first became acquainted with another predominant feature of national life: colonial enterprise: probably through his new associations with certain East Anglian families—the Jennings, the Latches and the Gorges—with whom he became intimate either through marriage ties or business connections. Without doubt it was this new idea that drove him again westwards to his native city and port in the middle years of the next decade, to start life afresh as a sugar refiner.

The third and final stage in his life covered the twenty-five years 1654–79, during which time he established for Bristol a revival of trade and industry closely connected with the West Indies. He was the pioneer captain of industry who realised the limitless possibilities for his city and for himself in the new

developments in the city's trading quests in Antillian waters.

He realized from the start that, if he were to succeed, it must be at the price of his last effort in resourcefulness. He knew that he would have to start from scratch, because all his available capital was locked up in the Drainage Scheme. Nevertheless he possessed certain advantages: local knowledge, local prestige, and local connections: these gave him an initial impetus which his newly acquired Puritanism may have stimulated. By unrelenting perseverance, exercised throughout the third and last portion of his life, he succeeded in founding Bristol's second sugar house; and in this effort, he may be proclaimed the progenitor of the twenty other refineries which arose in Bristol in the course of the next century. Herein lay untold wealth for the west country, and all this was due to Knight's pioneering venture in Commonwealth times. Thus in a single lifetime, John Knight's activities illustrate in miniature the most potent influences in national life. Although he was a forerunner in this new endeavour, cumulative evidence is forthcoming to show that his fellow citizens were also experiencing similar impulses.

Knight came of a mercantile family of considerable wealth and social position in the city, as can be seen from the genealogical table. The particular branch of the family we are interested in embraces five generations, beginning with a certain Francis, the progenitor of the other ten male members, and ending with Charles and Anne, the children of Sir John Knight, Mayor and M.P. for Bristol, who died in 1718. The table thus covers the century from Queen Elizabeth to Queen Anne. Of the five generations mentioned, we are principally interested in the third and fourth. Our major concern is with John Knight, junior (1616-1679) and his two sons—Sir John, the child of his first wife, and Joseph, the child of his second wife: and, in a minor degree, with the daughters of both his marriages, namely Mary I, Martha, and Mary II, because they married into families who performed yeoman service to the sugar business.

It is instructive to study the lives of his predecessors in order to understand the early influences bearing on him. By the time we meet the first member of his family—Francis Knight—he

had already amassed a fair fortune, sufficient to maintain the dignity of a sheriff of Bristol in 1579, and to keep up the social status of a Common Councilor (1579-99) and an Alderman (1599-1616). During this long period of 37 years, he was entrusted with the responsibilities of the mayoralty on two occasions, in 1594-5 and in 1613-4. Without doubt, Francis' wealth grew with his experience of public life, and his family prestige advanced by his acquiring lands and property in the countryside around Bristol. Indeed on 10 August 1594, we find him adding to his Congresbury estate, which he had first bought in the previous decade, by acquiring further portions of land and property to the tune of £701 17s 6d, and on 26 May 1595, he purchased from the Corporation (which was acting in the capacity of Governor of Queen Elizabeth's Hospital) more property to the value of £350. Francis' career therefore took the normal Elizabethan course.¹

The second generation produced three males and a female, named Martha; the three sons being, George,² a mercer; Edward³ and Francis,⁴ both merchants. It is with Edward, the second son, that we are principally concerned because it is in his son John that our interest lies.

There is, however, another interest attaching to the second generation; it concerns Martha,⁵ the sister of the three brothers. By her marriage to William Challoner,⁶ her household became the meeting place for members of the Knight and Challoner families, and perhaps occasionally for Robert Aldworth to whom both were connected—who, all being commercially minded, must naturally have talked of trade generally, and of mercery

¹ Fletcher's Report on Queen Elizabeth's Hospital (1839). Francis Knight, pp. 16, 18 Conveyance 4 Feb. 1600-1 to Francis Knight 'one of the Aldermen of Bristol.'

² Rev. A. B. Beaven's *Bristol Lists*, p. 299.

³ B.R., 3 Dec. 1607. 'son of Mr Alderman Knight.'

⁴ B.R., 14 August 1610.

⁵ Chancery Law Case. C2 K 3 (15 May 1618) in P.R.O. and *Bristol Lists*, p. 430.

⁶ B.R., 13 Jan. 1597. William Challoner, merchant, gained his burgess-rights of Bristol on the ground of his marriage with Martha, daughter of Francis Knight; also Bigland's *Wills*, Vol. iv, p. 314, College of Arms.

and grocery in particular. They can hardly have failed to speak of the new art of sugar baking, which was then being carried on at the St. Peter's refinery, the pet concern of Aldworth, William Challoner's uncle by marriage.

It was by then evident that Aldworth would die childless; they may therefore have expected an apportionment of the concern on Aldworth's death, especially as William Challoner's son—Robert—had served an apprenticeship under Aldworth,¹ and perhaps had found employment as a clerk in the sugar house afterwards. By 1630, however, the Challoner hopes were dashed by the death of William Challoner. This meant that when Aldworth died four years later, he left his house to Giles Elbridge (his faithful business manager) and made no provision in his will for the training of a successor in the concern.

William Challoner's three sons may have hoped to enter the sugar house at some time in the future, by right of purchase on the death of Giles Elbridge. Fortune, however, eluded the Challoners' grasp on this occasion; for he died in 1643 when the Civil war was already threatening the neighbourhood. But by 1648, the brothers Challoner attained their ambition and entered into possession of St. Peter's. They remained there for eighteen years. In the year 1658 a reference in the local archives shows that Richard Challoner supplied the Corporation with 103 lbs. of sugar as a gift in the shape of five loaves of sugar which were presented to Lord Cromwell on the occasion of his visit to the city². So from 1648, the Challoners, by practising as sugar bakers in Bristol's only sugar refinery,³ curbed the ambition of another young and ardent Bristolian who also had his eyes cast on St. Peter's. It was for this reason that our hero John Knight, junior, left Bristol and established a new home in East Anglia. The exact importance of the Challoner-Knight rivalry in Bristol at a later stage in Knight's career will be recounted later.

¹ B.R., 26 May 1627, Robert Challoner, merchant was made a Burgess of Bristol, having been an apprentice of Mr Alderman Aldworth, since 7 April 1619 (A.L.).

² 'Bristol—Past and Present,' p. 160.

³ St. Peter's Hospital deeds in the care of Bristol Archives Dept.

JOHN KNIGHT, JUNIOR, 1616-1679

We pass to the third generation in the genealogical table, to the central figure in our story, John Knight, junior. From his earliest years, he appears to have been an individualist. Born in 1616—the year of his grandfather's death—he was, most probably, brought up in the country either at Congresbury or at Wick St. Lawrence in the immediate neighbourhood. He may sometimes have been taken to visit the Challoner establishment in Bristol or his father's city counting house. He must have heard the family debate the problems and prospects of foreign trade: perhaps the future of the tobacco as against the sugar trade in the Virginian and West Indian regions: almost certainly the approaching contest between the metropolis and the outports, and particularly Bristol, for the monopoly of the newly-established trade to St. Kitts, Barbadoes, Nevis and Montserrat. In any case, his family outlook was concentrated on overseas markets rather than on trade amid the inland creeks and coastwise ports. He entered his father's office as an apprentice in 1634.

How John Knight started life on the completion of his apprenticeship in 1641, we do not know: what religious faith he accepted, we are not told; but we may guess that his reflections on trade, politics and religion were taking shape since he afterwards left the city for the Fen-country, where he joined the Puritan sect. His life and actions appear to have been moulded on personal observation. Thinking that the trade of Bristol was doomed by the impact of war, he gravitated to East Anglia. It may be that he had already been introduced to such Puritan leaders in Somerset as John Pym¹—perhaps through his first wife's family, the Parsons. This may account for his unexpected exodus from Bristol to the marshes of Decamore, Southmoor and Westmoor—the Fens around the Isle of Ely in Cambridgeshire and the homeland of Oliver Cromwell. In any case, this second portion of his career—a period of twelve years—made a marked impression on him.

¹ Brett, S. R., *John Pym 1583-1643*, Prologue, p. xxv, for Pym's lands in Somerset.

No sooner had Knight reached the age of 25 (1641) than he began looking about for a business into which to plunge. He had determined to forego his father's pursuit of mercery for one of a more general nature: probably he had his eyes set on the sugar house at St. Peter's where Giles Elbridge, growing old, and heavily encumbered with a debt of £3,000 to Humphrey Hooke, another local merchant, was contemplating what to do with his works. In 1643, when Elbridge died, Knight saw his chances of buying the sugar business gradually fade when Elbridge left it to his sons in the hope that it might stabilize their position. Five war-weary years, however, dragged on without restoring the situation for the Elbridges, who in 1648 resolved to sell the premises and the business. This time it was the Challoners who balked Knight of his prize; and it was this event which occasioned the latter's flight from the city. His hopes of fortune in the west were over: he determined to set out on life anew and journeyed into a strange land.

In the meantime, Knight must have become acquainted in some way or another with the exploits of Sir Cornelius Vermuyden, the Dutch engineer, in Eastern-England. Landlords and tenants of both Cambridgeshire and Somerset about this time shared a common interest in land drainage. Indeed Vermuyden is known to have been engaged in the drainage of the two districts simultaneously. Knight may have been drawn into the scheme through his first wife, whose family—the Parsons of Somerset—may have had connections with some south Somerset landowners who were engaged in land-drainage. On the other hand, his own problem of draining his Congresbury estate, which is low-lying, would have drawn him into contact with other Somerset farmers similarly perplexed about their water-logged land. In this way, he would have become acquainted with the Gorges, the Latches and the Jennings families who had estates in Wraxall, Churchill and Upper Langford on the foothills of the Mendips. Indeed, it appears likely that it was they who solicited his help in a joint effort to solve the problem in Somerset, they would thus regard their enterprise in the Bedford Level Scheme as a prelude to a more

serious venture on their own lands. The four families may have known each other long before they became associated in the Fenland scheme: as matters turned out, however, these ties grew into closer mutual bonds in the east, as we shall see in our more detailed descriptions of each family later.

We have no precise knowledge of when Knight bought his lands in East Anglia. We possess only two bits of positive evidence relating to his estate under the Bedford Level Scheme. Wells, the historian of the Drainage Plan, states that a certain 'Mr Knight, gentlemen,'¹ was present at a joint meeting of the Adventurers in 1656. The identity of this Mr Knight is shown by a parchment which has turned up amongst the property deeds of the Great House on St. Augustine's Back. This, dated 1675, recounts in detail the character, situation and Lot numbers of his pieces of land, comprising a total of 705 acres, and was drawn up four years before Knight's decease in order to confirm his gift to his second son Joseph on the occasion of his marriage to Joanna Selwyn.² Taken together, these stray references to Knight identify his interest in the east country, but unfortunately fail to establish his presence there during the second phase of his career. This, however, can be demonstrated by his relationships with his three friends, whose interest in the 95,000 acre drainage plan can be confirmed in Wells' history.

Knight's purchases must have taken place between certain limits of time: between 10 July 1641, when he attained his burgess rights in Bristol, and 13 January 1653, when he signed the property deeds relating to the Great House, Bristol. This period affords evidence of Knight's presence in the east, for otherwise he could not have established his friendships with Richard Gorges, John Latch and Thomas Jennings—with whom he was to be intimately associated in the last period of his life. Knight must have purchased his lots at various times during the Civil War during which time he made acquaintance with John Latch who became his father-in-law, with Richard

¹ Wells, Samuel, *History of Bedford Level*, Vol. 1, p. 304.

² Deeds of the Great House, St. Augustine's Back, Bristol, dated 1675, in the possession of the Bristol Merchant Venturers' Society.

Gorges, who aided his negotiation over the Great House, and with Thomas Jennings who came to Bristol in 1653 as the prospective manager of his sugar house.

On at least eight occasions Knight purchased his lands in 50 acre plots; at other times he bought 200 acres and two irregular patches of 15 and 90 acres respectively. These stretched over four 'moor-land' districts, namely Westmore, Southmore, Northmore and Decamore, all in the Isle of Ely near Welney. They appear to have been acquired at different times because they are referred to under the headings as Lots I, VII, XI, XV, XIX and XX. Possessors of these lands were known as Adventurers under the Corporation of the Bedford Level or the 95,000 acre scheme. Thus Knight's total estate amounted to 705 acres. What he paid for them is not told in his 1675 property deed, nor in Wells' description of the Isle of Ely in the Appendix to Vol. II, pp. 488-9. It would be interesting to find out if there were a probable exchange of lands at Congresbury for those in Ely. This would confirm our surmise that, at this stage of his life, Knight made a firm resolve to leave the Somerset flats for good, and to take up residence in the east once and for all.

Knight's arrival in his new surroundings marked a change in his life. Not only did this short period of his career witness the birth of his first five children but also more tragically the death of his first wife, which occurred before the end of the year 1651.¹ It meant, too, that he entered the ranks of the squirearchy—no mean achievement in the eyes of an Englishman of the 17th century—and this on his own initiative and not by reason of a parental gift of land. Henceforth he assumed the title of 'gentleman,' an honour by which the historian Wells designated him in the 1656 list of Adventurers, which is repeated in the title deeds of the Great House collection. He retained these lands throughout his life: they were the outward sign of personal achievement, and the certificate for his family's entry into the landed gentry.

¹ We know that the eldest child of his second wife, Mary Latch, was born in 1651.

These Welney lands eventually passed to Joseph Knight, the eldest son of his second wife, on the occasion of his marriage to Joanna Selwyn, a Gloucestershire heiress at Matson. Joseph became lord of the manor and renounced his father's claim to wealth as a Bristol sugar baker.

JOHN KNIGHT'S FIRST PROBLEM—FINDING A SITE FOR THE WORKS

When John Knight was a man in his late thirties, he set about the project of a Bristol refinery. He looked for a suitable building ready for use without much reconstruction, for his financial resources were limited. His capital was tied up in his Fenland estate, and so he had recourse to a series of borrowings at interest from local sources. He considered that his desired site should be near the city, on the wharfside, if possible, with accommodation for his family, his workmen and his apprentices, and most important of all, his manager. Moreover, it must be sufficiently spacious for part-conversion into a workshop with attendant outhouses such as a millhouse, bakehouse, warehouse, coach-house, counting house and stables. These were not extravagant demands for a new and highly capitalized industry. He decided to rent a piece of property for a term of years, and spent the greater portion of his resources on equipment such as copper coolers, copper basins, iron furnaces and cockles and the many instruments such as spadels, prickers, shovels and many more, needed in the specialized and skilful processes of sugar refining.

Knight found exactly what he needed in the Great House on St. Augustine's Back. On travelling down to Bristol to inspect the property, he saw that the estate contained gardens and orchards in addition to much vacant space for future development. What was more to his purpose, the site possessed a supply of running water, which issued from a neighbouring property on Brandon Hill¹ a supply which, during the Middle Ages, had

¹ George Parker, M.A., M.D., 'The Water Supplies of Bristol: Past and Present' *Proceedings Bristol Naturalists' Society*, 4th Series, Part VII, 1934.

fulfilled the requirements of the Carmelite friars who had occupied the site.

The situation of the Great House was imposing enough when viewed from the headwaters of the Froom. It covered about two thirds of the entire ground plan of the present Colston Hall. It had been the mansion which Sir John Young had

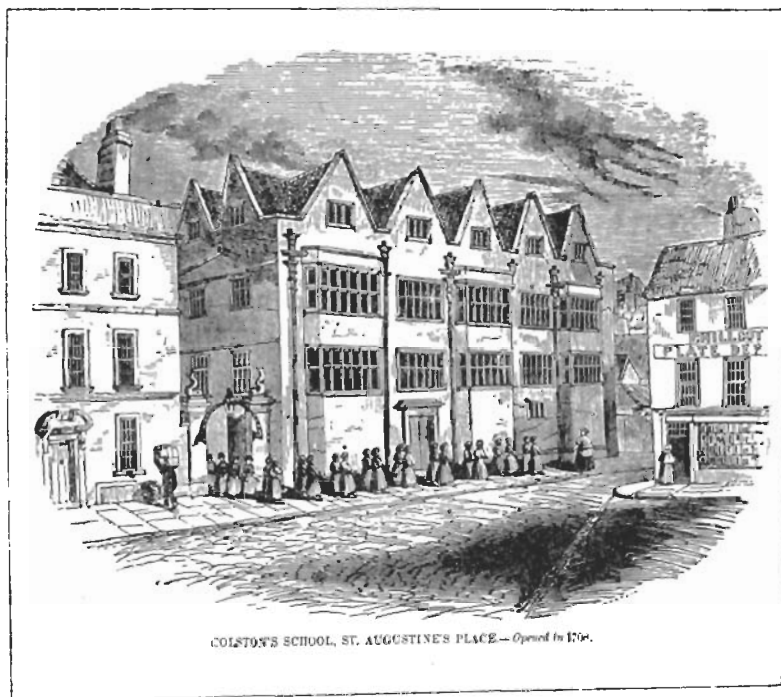


Fig. 1. The Great House, St. Augustine's Back

built for himself in the heyday of his career. The property deeds state that it was built of local pennant stone from the Stoney Hill quarry near at hand. After the Civil War it had so far lost its appeal for domestic use that Elizabeth Gorges, the relict of Hugh Smith, the owner, resolved to let it at a yearly

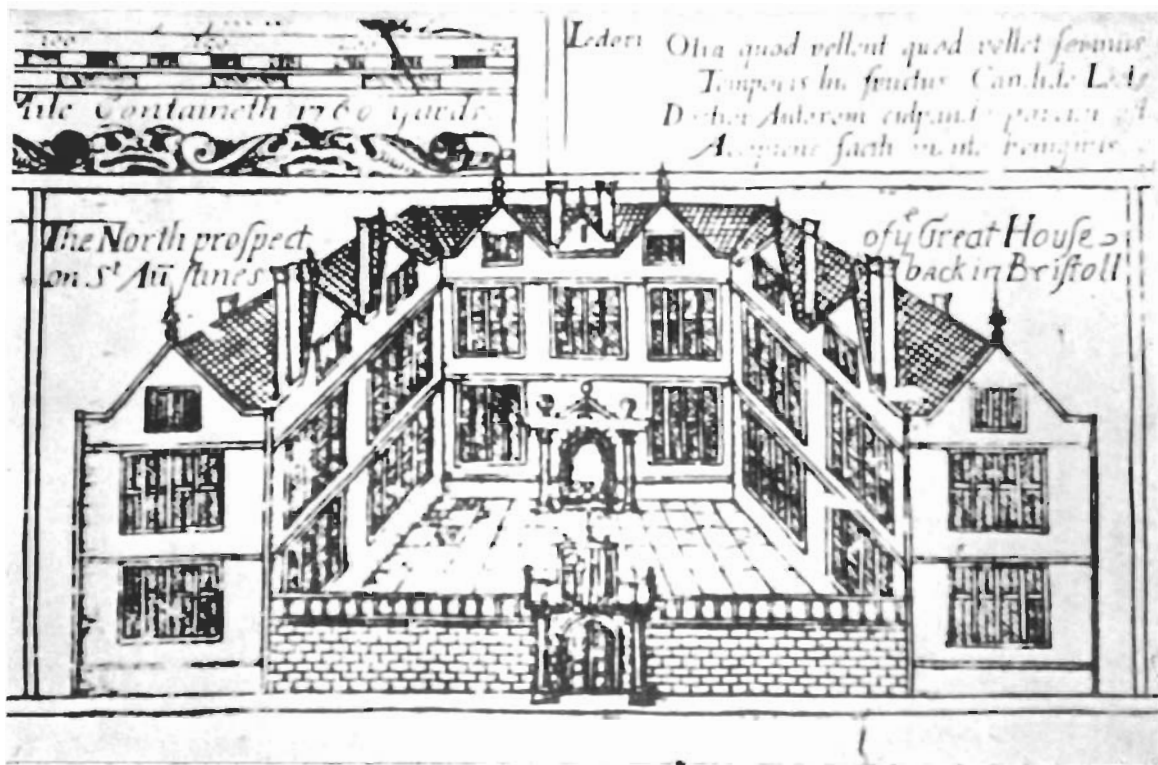


Fig. 2. The Great House, St. Augustine's Back
Miller's Map of Bristol, 1673

rent of £30 and a legal fine of £100 to John Knight for a term of forty-one years. Knight in 1653 converted it into a sugar house. Even another fifty years of industrial use did not greatly impair it, for when in 1708 it was converted into a Boy's School under the Edward Colston foundation, it had another century and a half's existence before it was pulled down in 1867 to make way for the present Colston Hall.

Nothing now remains of the original structure but I was fortunate in finding a well-executed sketch of the premises, drawn about a century ago, when the building was occupied as a school (FIG. 1). From this drawing we can see that the building was well-lighted on all sides and well-protected from intrusion from the outside world by a complete absence of windows on the ground level which was pierced only by a well-proportioned doorway facing the open pavement leading to the river bank. The five gables, perched high over the two-storey house, opened on to the south-westerly breezes as they swept over Dundry hill, some four miles distant; the double row of large mullioned windows, spaced proportionately within each of the five bays, one set above the other, and each crowned by a triangular gable, gave an appearance of stately design from the exterior. Moreover spaciousness is clearly suggested by the twenty rooms indicated by the window-spacing and the cellarage connoted by the long and deep foundation walling.

Just behind the Great House flowed the sluggish waters of the muddy From, which provided good harbourage for the many large and small coastwise and continental ships in their temporary stay in Bristol, as well as the larger ocean-going craft from the newly developing markets in North America and the West Indies. The whole site was admirably suited to the new sugar-house, with its restless coming and going of the import and export supplies of sugar on the wharfside and the continuous stream of traffic accompanying the new industry.

I have also been lucky in finding a contemporary engraving of the Great House regarded from a northerly aspect. It is one of a series of inset sketches surrounding the 1673 Millerd map of Bristol, and shows the Great House as a typical late Tudor

mansion (FIG. 2). The building covers three sides of a rectangle with a courtyard set in the midst of the two wings and the longer connecting portion. The house has two storeys and a cockloft. This particular view of the mansion gives an inadequate notion of the spacious dimensions of the entire structure by obscuring the corner blocks at the southerly end of the wings, thus giving a diminutive picture of what otherwise was a stately structure. It does, however, indicate the depth of the wings. A more reliable picture of the entire mansion can be obtained by relating the two sketches, which leaves the impression of a good-looking and solidly built house, worthy of offering entertainment to Elizabeth and Anne of Denmark on the occasions of their visits to the city. It is only by such a combination of pictures that we can get an exact view of the mansion corresponding to the detailed description of each room as given in the inventories, which indicate that it had some forty rooms of varying size and importance.

This was the exterior aspect of the house whose interior was equally attractive: oak panelling and wainscoting in durable woods not unlike that still to be seen in the neighbouring Red Lodge. The deeds do not reveal how much Sir John Young paid for the erection of the mansion, but they tell us that William Claxton paid £660 for it and that he gained £12 on selling it to Hugh Smythe in 1614. Doubtless the estate was maintained with care and attention by the Smythes—father and son—and by the latter's widow, Lady Elizabeth, but it was the rough usage during the late forties that caused its deterioration. The site value, however, retained much of its usefulness since spring water from the adjoining hill flowed through the estate.

The house, though the principal building on the site, was by no means the only structure, for within the bounds of the outer walls there were a range of outhouses, a little waterhouse, a water cistern which regulated the supply to the Great House, a wash house, a coach house and stables, all appropriately surrounded by a paved courtyard and capable of conversion to industrial purposes. All again were set within orchards and a garden, the whole bounded within an area now enclosed by

Pipe Lane on the west, Trenchard St. and the Red Lodge estate on the north and by a stretch to the east sufficient to accommodate a warehouse in the 18th century, when these suburbs of the city lost their residential character.

When property of this character was sold in those days it was customary to draw up an inventory of the external and internal fixtures attached to the estate. Luckily a series of these exist for the Great House, which allows a comparison to be made not only of this particular piece of property but also of this sugar house on St. Augustine's Back with its rival at Whitson Court.¹ Of the four schedules concerned with Knight's house, the first, dated 1653, furnishes the best material for a description of the mansion, as it specifies the rooms and gives the 'implements and utensils of household and household stuffe' associated with each. We can saunter through the entrance door to the domestic quarters—the butteries, the pantry and the larders—and entering the screen, pass to the main hall, the two parlours and the Lady's chamber. Connected with these particular rooms were others which were variously named; the writing room, the dining room, the withdrawing room and the 'little studdie'; besides these, there were others identified by such adjectives as 'dark,' 'starthing,' 'wainscotted,' 'brushing,' and 'further,' which were interspersed between the two galleries and the wardrobe.

The hall must have been divested of the Smythe's furniture—the settles and settees, the oak cupboards and chests—for the inventory merely mentions a tableboard, one drawing table, one door leading into the lobby, 'four wooden racks to hang the armour on.' The dilapidations caused by the more than ordinary hard usage during the Civil war are illustrated by the 'long tableboard' and a second screen both of which were consigned to the lumber room.

During the Knight period of occupation, the Great Parlour became a room of some pretension, with three tables and a

¹ These two inventories show that the capital fund of both houses was about £3,000.

heavy looking glass near which hung the portraits of Mr Chelsome and Mr Robert Knight. The windows had their leaded lights, in the midst of which were emblazoned the Knight coat-of-arms. The most conspicuous feature of the room was the stone chimney piece, carved elaborately along the side columns and across the breast.¹

In broad contrast to these long and low rooms, those of the domestic quarters were extremely plain with the oaken colours and a monotonous length of shelves; each room possessed its 'iron latch and katch.'

Of all these rooms, the kitchen is easiest to reconstruct. Stretching its whole length were the three long shelves and the two long dressers, the three wooden racks, the dog wheel, the spits and a crane attached to the iron-backed chimney. Hanging over the broad chimney piece were rows and rows of domestic utensils, forks, ladles, warming pans, spits and dozens of other implements, whilst under it were secured the crocks and cranes, the fire dogs and the dripping pan: all mentioned in the inventory, as if part and parcel of the permanent structure.

Underneath the rooms on the ground floor ran the cellars, with their beer racks and their powder tubs, and, on the ground floor, adjacent to the master refiner's quarters stood the counter where the business ledgers, day books and accounts were kept.

Though the list takes little notice of the furniture and the indoor appointments, it would seem that there were few bright colours to be seen within doors. What brightness appeared came from the light streaming through the leaded panes, sending the sun's rays back from the pewter pots, the polished chairs and table boards and the well shined kitchen vessels. On the other hand, the inhabitants of St. Augustine's Great House paid more than ordinary attention to the summerhouse, the orchards and the plaisance. These outdoor amenities of everyday life appear to have played a greater part in the life of pre-industrialized England than is generally considered.

¹ *B. and G. Arch. Soc.*, Vol. 30, p. 275.

And fresh air in this part of Bristol as well as the fresh greens of the neighbouring hills must have provided unconsciously much relief to the tired and hard-driven workmen within the heated furnace rooms and the warehouse of the St. Augustine's sugar refinery.¹

JOHN KNIGHT'S SECOND PROBLEM—FINANCING THE PROJECT

When Knight had found an appropriate site in Bristol on which to establish his project, he had to find a sufficient fund of money to set his new scheme in motion; to buy utensils for his workshop, to purchase stock and to cultivate a West Indian plantation, to find transport and a market for his refined products, to provide and train a manager and employ workmen in this hazardous and highly capitalized industry, and perhaps of greatest importance, to set it on its feet in such a way as to defy competition on the part of its rival house, St. Peter's, under the Challoners. To meet this situation, qualities of mind and character equal to the financial resources were called for; resolution of the highest order and a willingness to recognize and reward organizing ability. Who was the man behind the scenes backing Knight in this scheme? I venture to suggest that it was Richard Gorges, who introduced him to Lady Elizabeth Gorges, the owner of the Great House, as well as to Helena Smyth, the latter's sister-in-law, who supplied the handsome loan of £600 at interest.

To find the necessary capital to run his refinery, Knight was thrown on his own resources. Before leaving East Anglia, about 1652, he had calculated his monetary requirements in a general

¹ These schedules belong to a class of document frequently found in a parcel of deeds. They were drawn up by a lawyer who signed the official copy on the transfer of the property from one occupier to another. In the case of St. Augustine's deeds I have been lucky in finding four different lists covering the fifty years' existence as a sugar house: the first, dated 1653, indicates the state of the property after the dilapidations of the war years: the second, dated 1674, shows Knight's improvements during the intervening generation: the third, 1696, when Thomas Cole took over the sugar business from the Lanes, and the last, 1708, when Edward Colston purchased the property for conversion into his Boys' school.

way and had made preparations to that end even before arriving in Bristol, by gaining the patronage of John Latch, who promised him £2,000 as an investment in the name of his protégé Thomas Jennings. But Knight, knowing this amount to be insufficient, depended on soliciting other contributions from friendly citizens in Bristol. This might be done by borrowing at interest, or failing that, by taking in other wealthy merchants as co-partners.

We have grounds for believing that Knight, by force of hard circumstance, was obliged in the end to accept the latter alternative, because his initial attempt to run the concern under sole management met with miserable failure. It happened in this way. On arrival in Bristol, he was fortunate in making an early acquaintance with Helena Smyth whose immediate ancestors had been promoters of colonial ventures. She accordingly lent him £600 at interest. This was managed in all probability by Richard Gorges, a relation of Helena Smyth, and in a sense, the man behind Knight both earlier in the Fenland and now in Bristol. This early success inspired Knight to continue this method of approach among his new neighbours: eventually, he obtained another £500 from a certain Elizabeth Appleton. These two loans secured for Knight not only greater independence of action but the advantage of secrecy amongst local inhabitants and local rivals. With this £1,100, he purchased the equipment for his workshops, and his first stock of materials—weighty expenditure to which must be added the annual rental of £30 for the Great House, together with the £100 deposit called in the deeds a fine. So he faced the year 1654 with confidence as the sole proprietor controlling a one-man business with a capital of £3,000 behind him.

He was however on the brink of catastrophe. Of all forms of organization, sole management was most successful when backed by the consolidated support of a family, wealthy in material resources and sound in experience of business method; depending in other words, on mercantile capital accumulated by successful trading and not on the risks associated with loaned capital, especially when provided by unmarried women.

Economic life at his time had been disrupted by a Civil war, and new enterprises had to accept conditions as they were rather than as they should be; and of all men Knight was a man of action prepared to take risks. If we knew the whole human story behind, we might well find a deliberate and deep-seated plot on the part of his cousins, the Challoners, his rivals at St. Peter's Sugar House, to break up his undertaking in its initial stage. It was, I think, William Challoner's revenge for John Knight's attempt to acquire St. Peter's in 1643, and perhaps again in 1648.

It was not long after Knight's first success in 1653, that he met his first rebuff from an unexpected quarter. This arose from the marriage of Elizabeth Appleton to William Challoner. William Challoner at once demanded the immediate withdrawal of his newly-wedded wife's capital of £600 from Knight. If surmises were permitted in historical exercises, one might think that William had purposely played a prank on his cousin: being cognisant of his intended bride's actions in 1653, he encouraged her conduct only to interfere again to the discomfort of his cousin a year later. And if we could establish a connexion between William Challoner and Robert Bourne, the intended bridegroom of Helena Smyth, we should feel inclined to confirm the suspicion because, about the same time, indeed in the same year, Robert Bourne repeated Challoner's demand for the restoration of his bride's capital (£500). Here was a crippling blow for Knight!¹ In 1653 he was at the height of his youthful expectation: in 1654 in the throes of despair; for his working capital of £1100 had been sunk, partly as fixed capital in the property and partly as liquid capital in the stock.

Henceforth, of one thing Knight became convinced: since he could not supply the entire capital out of his own pocket nor by a series of short-term loans at interest, it would be necessary

¹ Chancery Law Case C 512 (date 1680). John Knight of Bristol, merchant
46
versus i.e. 'John Knight of the hill.' Joseph Knight and Shershaw Cary.

to form an industrial partnership. To organize such an association was not an easy matter. It depended on several considerations. How many partners should there be? Should they, in the interests of security, be selected from within or outside his family circle? Should not one be chosen for his knowledge of inland trade, both in the west country and in the country generally: and should not another be a merchant, accustomed to fetching and carrying general merchandize from the far Atlantic shores, especially the sugar cane from our West Indian islands? If each of these moneyed men contributed £2000, then their combined capital would dwarf that of his cousins at St. Peter's. The next project was to find men willing to be such partners and secure a paid-up contribution from each of them.

How did John Knight face the situation? Having most of his capital tied up in the 705 acres in the Fenlands, he had slender resources of his own, and was in the predicament of having to refund the £1100 loans immediately. He fell back on his friends and relations. On his own part, he had £350, or one third of the sum required. He borrowed £750 from his eldest son, John Knight, called 'of the Hill' in order to differentiate him from his father and from two other John Knights, also members of his family and living in Bristol at the same time.¹ So between the three of them, John Knight gathered his £1100 and repaid his borrowed capital to Helena Smyth, now Bourne, and Elizabeth Appleton, now Challoner.

The actual negotiations were not so simple as would appear for they involved other people—one being his son already mentioned and another being a certain Ann Longman, another local spinster, from whom the father borrowed £500 in order in part to refund the £750 which he had gathered from his son. To complicate matters John Knight refused to repay these two debts until his son confronted him with the occurrence on his deathbed when the executrix (his second wife) was bidden to make due amends. This took place in 1679, some 25 years after the initial date of the negotiation. A further entanglement

¹ Rev. A. B. Beaven's *Bristol Lists*, p. 430.

ensued when, in 1680, the executrix by refusing payment to Ann Longman, caused the latter to bring a lawsuit to obtain satisfaction. The details of this story make sorry reading if all the statements can be believed. So we relate the facts for what they are worth as evidence,¹ they reveal, however, the state of John Knight's private exchequer in 1654 and something of the true state of affairs at St. Augustine's Back in the early years of its existence.

The first man whom John Knight approached with a view to partnership was his cousin, a wealthy grocer who lived in the Temple district of Bristol where he possessed property and was socially well-respected. He was no other than John Knight, later called Sir John 'the elder' a faithful follower of Charles II, who knighted him in 1663 for his loyalty during the early years of the Restoration. There was one underlying cause of friction in this trade alliance—the one John was a Puritan who in 1654 was in the ascendancy of power, and the other John, 'Sir John,' was an Anglican who was weighing his enmities against his religious opponents until such a time as he could vent his spleen upon them (and the time came!); for the present, however, he was of use to our anxious organizer who wished to ally with him as a counterweight to the Challoners. The other co-partner whom John Knight secured was Shershaw Cary, a highly-respected figure in local society, whose family had struggled cheek by jowl with the Knights in local politics, and had attained the highest offices in public life since the Armada: the father of a far more renowned character and writer, John Cary, the Essayist and founder of the workhouse system in Bristol. Together these three met at a lawyer's office and drew up the Articles of Copartnery by which they 'regulated the stock and the disposition and distribution thereof.' This was John Knight's answer to the crisis of 1654.²

¹ Chancery Law Case, 512
46

² Chancery Law Case, C 459. John Cary *versus* Joseph Knight, 1682.

THE FIRST PARTNERSHIP, 1654-1668

The first problem of the partnership was to settle the contribution each member should pay, and whether this should be rendered by way of annual instalments or as a fully paid-up sum. From a statement made in a subsequent Chancery case, it would appear that each partner agreed on £2000 as a reasonable figure, but if this sum represented the first and full contribution or the ultimate call-up is not mentioned. This question was of some moment in the light of John Knight's financial predicament in the year 1654, and of his actions over the firm's accounts three years later, by which time the three associates appear to have made complete payments. One item in the negotiations concerns Thomas Jennings' entry into Bristol, which records the bond money which John Latch, the Middle Temple lawyer, offered to back young Jennings' entry into Bristol in 1653. This figure £2000, mentioned in the Burgess Rolls,¹ may bear this significance, that already before starting the project of a partnership, Knight had forecast the total capitalization of the undertaking, but had not then considered the threefold association as the best method of organising the enterprise, and that a £2000 bond was the most convenient amount to be borne by a single associate if and when a partnership were ever contemplated. It may therefore be assumed that John Knight's influence was paramount at the preliminary meeting of the three partners in the year 1654.

We are lucky in possessing much first-hand material about the Great House, but it is of little use in the solution of this particular problem. Naturally the first and largest item was for the premises²—which as we already know cost £100—the fine to the property-owner who also charged an annual rental of £30. Then came the conversion of a private mansion to work

¹ A.L. '10 Oct. 1653. Thomas Jennings, son of Thomas Jennings of Hayes, Middlesex, Esq: decd., was bound to John Knight, junior, merchant, and Mary, his wife, for 7 years, paying 4s 6d for his freedom. A bond of £2,000 upon John Latch, senior, of Middle Temple, London, Esq., for service and truth.'

² Great House, St. Augustine's Back, Bristol. Indenture dated 13 Jan. 1653.

premises, partly domestic and partly industrial. This item¹ which entailed the erection of thirteen new cottages for the workmen cost the lordly sum of £1,000. The rest concerned expenditure on the personnel and the equipment. It was usual to pay a salary of £60 for the services of an accountant² and £60 for the chief workman or technical expert,³ and lesser sums to each of the three or four workmen in the shops, amounting to about £200 in all. To these sums must be added another £70 or thereabouts for the utensils,⁴ making a grand total of some £1,400.⁵ There was therefore a large sum of money left over for the purchase of stocks of raw sugar, coal, lime, clay and paper,⁶ and a very liberal margin for such exigencies as a fire or depreciation of stock or market fluctuation in prices due to ill-judged purchase⁷—circumstances which actually happened to the managers of the other local houses in the latter half of the 17th century. Experience alone would show whether reserve funds at the Great House were too large, and this investigation was carried out by John Knight during the first three years of the firm's existence.

¹ *ibid.* Indenture, 19 Oct. 1660.

² Chancery Law Case C 5 451 30 Ch. 11 1679. Richard Beauchampe, the manager at St. Peter's Sugar House, stated that William Swifte, his master, paid him £60 salary as accountant and £12 for board per annum.

³ Chancery Law Case, C 5 451 1666. In 1666, £72 was allowed to the Chief workman; £60 for wages, £12 for board.

John Hine, sugar baker in the St. Thomas Street Sugar House, Bristol, paid his journeyman, Robert Newport, £13 as a yearly wage. 1672-82 Jurie Book. Bristol Archives Dept.

⁴ Chancery Law Case C 459

97

⁵ St. Peter's Sugar House, Bristol, deeds, 1696. Within a small margin this figure corresponds with the sale price of St. Peter's Sugar House in 1696, with the Great House in St. Augustine's Back in 1708, and with Whitson Court Sugar House in 1690 on the occasion of the auction sale when Michael Pope entered into possession.

⁶ *B. and G.A.S. Trans.*, Vol. 65, 1944. Whitson Court Sugar House, Bristol, p. 49.

⁷ Christopher Willington, sugar baker, at St. Peter's Sugar House, Bristol, 1657, lost his job for the exercise of bad judgment in the purchase of sugars.

Alongside this indication of the margin between fixed and liquid capital, we must place an alleged statement of accounts for the year 1657. In the absence of an authoritative statement based on a series of annual accounts such as Knight had undoubtedly presented to his two partners at the end of the two previous years, we have the sworn statement by John Cary relating to this particular year 1657. This asserted that, as the result of a valuation of the estate and the stock, the firm's credit stood at £10,995 18s 11¼d: against this total the partners had to write off, what in 17th century language was described as 'desperate debts'¹: these were computed at £1,534 19s 7d. Granting that the paid-up capital was £6,000, the difference between the credit balance and the total capital represented a gratifying state of affairs, and this after only three complete years of trading. Whether this statement for 1657 has any value as evidence of the real state of trade at the Great House is an open question: at least this may be believed in its favour, that Cary's opponents never denied it. And on Cary's behalf, we should note that at this time Cary's father was a firm friend and partner of Knight; indeed Cary asserted that his figures came from the firm's papers made in that year. This was a handsome profit for a business so lately founded, and one which justified Knight's decision to enter the industrial field. But did this financial state of well-being really make for goodwill among the three partners or did one, more ambitious than the rest, seek to oust another from the business? We can trace this sad story, I think, in the legal evidence and in the property deeds.

The year 1657 marks the beginning of the first rift in the good relations of the Knight cousins—a division of opinion which led to the eventual dissolution of their partnership in the next decade, and the source of the first of the legal quarrels which took place in the year 1664. It was noted that from 1657 John Knight, as the paid accountant of the firm, ceased to carry out

¹ Chancery Law Case C 459 (date 1682). John Cary *versus* Joseph Knight.

one of his specified duties of presenting accounts to his partners on the appointed day, or of permitting an examination of the books on demand. This happened because he ceased to keep the accounts and thus prevented inspection.¹ In order to upset the good relations of the partners, John Knight began to withdraw capital from the paid-up fund, £900 at a time: this occurred on two separate occasions apparently in the same year. In this way each share, originally standing at £2,000, was reduced by £600 after the two withdrawals and finally stood at £1,400. It was never contended by John Knight 'the elder' that there was anything underhand in this transaction since all three parties always received the proportionate allotment of the profit and duly acknowledged the receipt of their share reductions (£600). The firm continued to exist on its reduced capital during the next seven years (1657-1664). By 1664, however, the political balance of power within the Kingdom had changed and the Commonwealth had given way to the restored Stuart monarchy; moreover Sir John Knight 'the elder' had just given over the reins of office as Mayor of Bristol (during which time, 1663, he was knighted), and now he felt emboldened to put his suspicions about the management of the firm's affairs to the test. He suspected that his cousin, John Knight, junior, and Shershaw Cary, were trying to cold-shoulder him out of the firm so as to make way for Thomas Jennings. In 1664, Sir John Knight, 'the elder', brought an action against the three confederates—John Knight, junior, Shershaw Cary and Thomas Jennings—for withholding his right to inspect the accounts and for 'drowning the lease' of the Great House as he put it.² In the trial, two issues rather than one developed, so that, whilst the judge decreed in the one case that the business profits should be declared and divided amongst the three original partners as had been the custom in the first three years of the partnership, he recommended with regard to the difficult question of proprietary rights over the Great

¹ Chancery Law Case C 459 (date 1682). John Cary *versus* Joseph Knight.

² *ibid.*

House, that another trial at law should be held to unravel its mystery. Thus in 1664, Sir John Knight, 'the elder,' solved the query which threatened him over his exclusion from the partnership in favour of the firm's manager, Thomas Jennings. He gained a tactical victory in that Jennings was declared to share no part in the business partnership.

So things continued until 1668 when Sir John, again finding his position within the firm as awkward as his personal relations with his cousin in the outer world, resolved to discontinue his share in the partnership. He therefore took his proportion of the profits in 1668 and withdrew his capital. So ended the first partnership in 1668.¹

What other irregularities of conduct there were in the ordinary day-to-day run of life which produced this mutual distrust and irritation between the two cousins, we do not know; it is possible that their differences in religious outlook undermined their relationship, which otherwise stood on a substantial economic basis. Sir John, 'the elder,' whilst Mayor of Bristol in 1663 and whilst M.P. for Bristol between 1660 and 1680 came into contact with religious issues on a wide scale, and took a decided line against religious fanatics, as he called the Nonconformists. That he allowed these divergences of opinion between himself and his cousin to invade his business relationship within the refinery and in the family seems probable, for as the year 1670 approached—the year of John Knight, junior's mayoralty—their feelings ran so high as to burst the bounds of respectability.

In 1670 Sir John's anger was fired to white heat. He denounced his cousin roundly as a fanatic (Dissenter) and reported the matter to the Privy Council, which called both relatives before it for examination. Eventually after John, junior, had suffered many months of imprisonment, the Bristol Council supported its Mayor for his bearing in public and private, his admirable loyalty and devotion to his public duties and made strong

¹ C 457

representations on his behalf, so that the Privy Council released him with honour. In Bristol, he received a great public welcome on his return from London, and on his luckless cousin the public poured scorn and contempt. Without doubt, these violent antipathies between the cousins in public life in 1670 reflected their attitude the one towards the other throughout the major part of their business association. That affairs which came to a head in 1668 with the dissolution of association, did not separate them for ever is indicated by their conduct two years later. Their hatred was bitter.¹

JOHN KNIGHT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH SHERSHAW CARY,
THE SECOND MEMBER OF THE PARTNERSHIP
1653-1674

Friendly relations marked the association of John Knight and Shershaw Cary throughout almost the whole period of their partnership. This was due in all probability to their mutual distrust of royal policy in religious and political matters during the early portion of their lives, but with the restoration of the Stuarts, and their own advancing years, they began to view things generally from different angles. This alteration of opinion did not vitally affect their personal relationships: it simply meant that they agreed to differ: and indeed, their undisturbed friendship in the business formed the sheet anchor of their commercial and industrial success.

This changing of opinion first showed itself in the conduct of John Knight who, at first reluctant to enter the public service as a Common Councillor in Bristol (1653-4), eventually decided to cast in his lot with his fellow merchants, and enter public life with a view to controlling the new industry for which he was responsible by watching its new entrants and excluding those whom he considered undesirable from joining it.

Thus he served as Common Councillor from 1661 to 1672, and as Alderman from 1672 to the year of his death 1679: and twice

¹ Latimer: *Annals of Bristol in the 17th Century*, p. 356.

during those 18 years of continuous service, he was entrusted with dignified and honourable offices, as Sheriff in 1664-5 and as Mayor in 1670-1. In his return to a life of public service, he was reverting to his family tradition, established and maintained in Elizabethan and Early Stuart times. The tradition was particularly alive amongst the Knights of the Restoration years, and especially among the four Johns—all close relations—the distinguishing of whose activities present much difficulty to local historians.¹

Shershaw Cary, on the other hand, refused to be drawn into public life, and openly, even defiantly, declined to serve on the Council; instead he preferred joining the Merchant Venturers' Society and by so doing, considered that he was carrying out the same policy as his friend.² This abstention from public service gave him a greater opportunity of helping his business associates on the market place, on the quayside and in the counting house.

Shershaw Cary, a man of Knight's age and breeding, was baptized in St. Nicholas Church, Bristol, on 6th April 1615, apprenticed to a local merchant by the name of Richard Vickeris, on a bond of £200 which was paid by his father, on 8 November 1632, and made a burgess, in the same year as his future business companion, on the eve of the Civil War (21 July 1641). Having been nurtured as a merchant, it was natural that he should have chosen this as his special function in the business: accordingly his name occurs with regularity in the pages of the port books, and as a buyer of 'raw browns' on behalf of the firm. Not that he was the only member of the concern so occupied, but from the amounts of sugar he constantly bought at the wharveside, I feel confident in claiming him as the chief buyer.³

The year 1671 may be taken as representative on describing the work of Shershaw Cary. In the port books his name frequently occurs as the purchaser of small quantities of raw

¹ Rev. A. B. Beaven's *Bristol's Lists*, pp. 204-5, 299, 430.

² Latimer: *Annals of Bristol in the 17th Century*, p. 330.

³ Bristol Port Books, 1671.

browns from Barbadoes and Nevis, and occasionally from Brazilian sources arriving at Bristol via Oporto and Lisbon. The quantities do not greatly vary in size. On 22 August 1671 the 'Gabriel of Bristol' of 100 tons burden, an English-built ship, berthed at Bristol from Nevis carrying 72 tons of brown sugars. On this occasion three representatives of the Great House were in competition with thirty others in making purchases. John Knight got 69 cwts., Mary Knight (presumably his wife) 12 cwts., and Shershaw Cary, the largest purchaser, 137½ cwts. Altogether they bought twice the quantity obtained by their rival at the Whitson Court Sugar House, Bristol. This was a typical entry for the year 1671, when 35 ships arrived in Bristol from the West Indies, and an occasional one from Portuguese Brazil and another via New England. Every now and then Philip Jennings, the brother of Thomas, made purchases: on 23 August 1671, he bought 149 cwts. aboard the 'Jacob of Bristol' (90 tons burden) which had come from Nevis. With the approach of the year 1673, Cary appears to have fled to Lisbon where some eight years later he died.¹ Until then (1673), his name occurred with regularity in the Bristol Port Books as a buyer of sugar cane for the Great House, and after his sojourn abroad, all attempts to communicate with him either by John Knight or by his son John,² met with no success, to the satisfaction of the former who thus justified his assertions before the law that he had bought out his partnership share before he left the port, and much to the chagrin of the latter who failed thereby to overthrow Knight's contention by written evidence. Thus until the last decade of their lives, these two business allies worked with complete harmony.

The mutual relations between the two partners revealed in the port books were but a symbol of something deeper in the life of the city than the mere business ties between them. They had a counterpart in the history of the Whitson Court Sugar

¹ Chancery Law Case 459

² The son was not knighted until 1682.

House where the names of Ellis and Gunning were linked together in a somewhat similar way. The Pope family which was also connected with the same house, sprang from the same class of society and represented the same social forces at work. I think that in these circumstances, can be seen the workings of a new spirit in industry, parallel to similar undertakings in commerce, which had characterised the practices of their grandfathers in the prosperous days of Anglo-Spanish trade in Elizabethan England. In other words, the call of opportunity, occasioned by the opening up of the American World to English enterprise, drew together the members of that society which saw its chances of survival slipping away under the metropolitan bid to monopolise the new centre. The struggle of the West therefore developed in a special direction by encouraging west country adventurers not only to pull together in organizing enterprises overseas but also in planning industrial units which became an essential factor in the growth of mercantile theory and practice of the mid-century. Thus the moneyed classes united in the task of financing new shipping services at the same time as new industrial firms for manufacturing West Indian raw products. That the contest would be long and enduring no one realized more clearly than the leaders of this pioneer movement—the Aldworths and Elbridges the Ellises and Gonnings, the Colstons and the Knights and the rest of the Elizabethans of the West, stationed in Bristol; and so they clung together as a class and as a society. Accordingly they strove to form business partnerships, associated together as a Merchant Venturers Society and dominated the Common Council.¹

Another outward sign of social equality was indicated by a grant of arms from the College of Heralds—a prize of great

¹The argument has added point if we regard the Challoner family at St. Peter's Sugar House as Londoners—and pioneers of metropolitan influence in the Bristol sugar industry. See the Challoner genealogical table where William Challoner, of a London merchant family, came to Bristol in 1597 to be apprenticed to Robert Aldworth, the sugar refiner. Note too that Challoner's sister married Aldworth.

esteem amongst families capable of tracing an ancestry of authenticated accuracy for several generations. These aspirants to social position were particularly active among the west country social climbers in the 17th century. The age of the Tudors had given opportunity to individuals like the Cabots and the Thornes who had displayed enterprise in overseas adventures: the Stuart period gave opportunities to family groups to consolidate their social position by holding honourable posts of responsibility in local townships, and by bearing coats of arms. This was the century when these families found ways and means of knitting their wealth into a woven texture of a local aristocracy, by participating in trade partnerships and by intermarrying, in a fashion which secured the exclusion of unwanted and unaccredited intruders from their circle. Thus arose those amalgamations of mercantile capital amongst such armigerous families as the Knight, Cary, Lane, Hart and Cole groups which were connected with the Great House on St. Augustine's Back¹: the Day-Colston group at St. Peter's Sugar House, Bristol (1689-1696); the Horts at 97 Redcliff St. Sugar House (1689-1715); and the Hine-Lane partnership at St. Thomas St. Sugar House (1662-78). These are all instances of families of accredited position in the moneyed world of Bristol who seized opportunities of entering the industrial field associated with West Indian enterprise, and determined to withstand metropolitan attempts to penetrate the Bristolian or outpost markets. Their efforts not only put Bristol at the head of the West Indian trade, but also devised the partnership method of industrial organization and backed it by co-operative power in the City Council. The equivalent effort in the marriage market can be seen in the Knight-Jennings unions: Thomas Jennings and his younger brother James married John Knight's two daughters both named Mary—the former married Mary, the daughter of his master's first marriage, and the latter married Mary, the daughter of his second marriage.

Shershaw Cary sprang from a family of moneyed interests

¹ *B. and G.A.S. Trans.*, Vol. 2.

with a social outlook and a pride born of achievement; one associated mainly with the local cloth trade but one willing to take advantage of a new market, given the opportunity of change: moreover, one anxious to adventure abroad both in person and as an entire family, given the occasion. This healthy and purposeful atmosphere encouraged an ambition to display armorial bearings and to rank alongside other enterprising families, and a willingness to give battle to the London merchants who were aiming at ousting Bristolians from West Indian markets. Luckily for the Londoners, the American and other colonial markets presented fields of enterprise too large and expansive to be absorbed by any would-be monopolists: luckily too for the Bristol merchants, these West Indian and northern colonies, diversified by climate and by geographical distribution, offered such prospects: and luckily again, during the middle decades of this century, the West Indian economy was changing over from tobacco to sugar cane, with attendant problems of land, labour and capital. These were the changing conditions operating in the West Islands during the Commonwealth and Later Stuart years, giving rise to a veritable economic revolution there. It was into this new world that Knight and Cary plunged when they, in partnership, founded their sugar bakery: it was their insight into oceanic conditions of trade, and their pertinacity in making their enterprise a success against possible overthrow from competing forces: it was their mercantile capital that they ploughed into their new industry, the Cary profits of the clothing trade going into the sugar business, whilst the Knight funds went into the purchase of a sugar plantation in Nevis.

Corroborative evidence of the good understanding between Shershaw Cary and John Knight is also forthcoming from a study of the two Chancery Law cases of 1664 and 1668 already referred to wherein Sir John Knight brought actions against his cousin.

In the first of these cases, Shershaw Cary took John Knight's side against his cousin Sir John. Obviously it was to his advantage to do so for if Sir John were to be excluded from the

partnership to which he had contributed £2,000 as a paid-up share, the other two partners must have conferred with one another as to a substitute with an equal amount of capital. There seems no doubt that their candidate was Thomas Jennings, the protégé of John Latch who had backed the latter's application for citizenship in 1653 with a £2,000 bond, because there is positive evidence of Jennings using £1,200 in the erection of fifteen workmen's dwellings on the Great House estate in 1660. It was this negotiation which awoke Sir John's suspicions about Jennings' real status in the joint concern. Jennings was employed as the manager of the firm but, his financial backing always harassed Sir John's security. The clarification of his position was one of the two subjects of discussion in the 1664 Chancery law case, and although Sir John succeeded in establishing his own status in the business side of the partnership, we cannot doubt that Shershaw's relationship with his two confederates (John, junior, and Jennings) was perfectly evident to Sir John.

By backing Jennings' somewhat dubious negotiations in the purchase of the Great House in 1660, and in the erection of fifteen workmen's cottages in 1661, Shershaw Cary showed that he had been privy to the arrangements which went on behind the scenes with John, junior. Clearly Cary recognised the necessity of attracting another monied man to replace Sir John, and so he added his authority to the deal. The 1664 legal decision in favour of Sir John, by excluding Jennings from the business partnership, nevertheless confirmed Cary's position amongst the triumvirate. Whether a judge would also consider Cary as part-owner along with the same two associates in the possession of the Great House or whether John, junior, alone would be accredited with sole proprietorship depended upon another adjudication which came up in another set of legal pleadings four years later.

During these intervening years, Sir John, irritated by the uncertainty of his position, as part owner of the Great House, quarrelled time and again with his cousin. By 1668 the inevitable occurred. Sir John brought up his case against John,

junior, to contest the question whether in 1653 the latter negotiated with Elizabeth Gorges for the leasing of the Great House on a 41-year term on his own behalf, or on that of the triumvirate, and to his satisfaction the judge decreed in favour of the latter. He then made up his mind to dissolve partnership with his two associates and relinquish his business connexions as well as his part-ownership of the house. Accordingly the three partners met and agreed on a compensation figure on both counts to reimburse Sir John for the use of his capital. What the amount for the house was we have not been able to discover for John, junior, chagrined by his defeat in 1668, contrived to make further trouble which involved Cary at a later stage in the proceedings. But with regard to the business, the compensation amounted to £200: this covered the cost of utensils in the sugar baking processes. Accordingly John, junior, paid his cousin this amount in the name of himself and of Shershaw Cary and so the partnership was dissolved.¹

And now for the sequel. John Knight was left to play his part with Shershaw Cary. This decision to pay out Sir John, revived in John junior's mind his original determination to run the concern on the basis of sole management, but in order to accomplish this aim he would have to buy out Cary's shares in the business, in the Great House and in the implements in use in the bakery—three items particularised in the legal decrees. Whether this idea was ever agreed to by Cary we have now no definite means of ascertaining because Shershaw, fleeing the country to Lisbon about 1674, left no traces of his negotiations either with John Knight, nor with his son John Cary. From evidence which we have already quoted about his work for the firm in the 1671 Port Books, it would appear that his interests were intimately and happily centred on the Great House. By 1674 we know that he had left the country, and had taken up his abode in Portugal, whence he neither communicated with Knight who sent messages there to confirm his

¹ C 459. Joint and Several Answers of Joseph Knight and Richard Lane,

statement that he had compensated Cary for the sale of his shares in the sugar house, nor with his son John who was equally anxious to refute Knight's assertions on the point.

On Knight's side it was affirmed that he had paid out Shershaw Cary for his partnership interest in the Great House separate from his other negotiations relating to the stock and the utensils. With regard to the latter certain sums such as £100 and £91 15s *od* were mentioned as amounts owing to Knight by Cary: and these covered the latter's claims against the compensation for the utensils. Apparently it was on these grounds that Knight advanced his claims to sole proprietorship. By 1674 therefore Knight considered that he had paid out both Sir John and Shershaw Cary, but on the latter's part, no evidence in support of the claim was forthcoming. And so matters remained. Shershaw's retirement abroad was interpreted by Knight as absconding without payment of debts. That the whole affair was unsatisfactory in the eyes of John Cary accounts for his persistent contention in the future years that his father had conferred his share in the Great House, the implements and the stock during the remainder of the 41 years' lease on him.

John Cary's case, however, weakened with the lapse of time: after his father's flight abroad, he suffered from lack of corroborative evidence from his parent. After John Knight's death in 1679, he took up the cudgels with the latter's son Joseph, who further spoiled Cary's arguments by selling the Great House and the refining business to Richard Lane. After the new management had reconstructed the property (1679-1696) it became increasingly difficult to assess compensation, especially as John Cary had to depend on his father's old friends for evidence of conditions long ago. Altogether with the passage of time Cary's case grew weaker and weaker and his figure for compensation dropped from £300 in 1682 to £50 in 1708. These figures we can prove, by reference to the property deeds, which state that Joseph Knight's estimation of Cary's indemnity by the Chancery judge would be £300; by 1708 this figure had shrunk to one third of the amount—a figure which was again

reduced by one half on final settlement later in the same year.

Such was the nature of the quarrel between the many contestants on both sides throughout the half century. Such also was the contentious age in which these enterprising and courageous people lived. From their wranglings, we get a glimpse of their characters, their immature gropings towards a legal definition of industrial partnership, and the depths to which human relationships, whether among cousins or social equals, can sink when the stakes run high.

JOHN KNIGHT'S THIRD PROBLEM—MANAGEMENT

Not the least of Knight's worries from the start had been the question of management. Quickly crowding on the jealousy of his trade rivals—the Challoners at St. Peter's—came the necessity of providing adequate funds to establish the business, and of meeting the censures of his cousin. Perhaps the greatest source of irritation between the two relatives arose out of the close relationship between John Knight and Thomas Jennings who, from the beginning, appears to have assumed the rôle of companion and prospective works-manager. Here, in the wise selection of a competent works-official—one with ability to control the inner working of the house, the training of apprentices, and the supervision of the journeymen—lay the solution of many difficulties. Just as Aldworth (1612-1634) the founder of St. Peter's settled this problem by appointing his friend, Giles Elbridge, to full control, so Knight brought his own companion to the Great House. By so doing, he guaranteed secrecy in the conduct of affairs through Jennings' ignorance of west country conditions, and by providing him with domestic quarters under his own roof, he thus made security doubly secure and ensured a watch on the premises by night and by day. And if the newcomer possessed private means, so much the better for him because he could strengthen his position in the firm. It was this fact that roused Sir John Knight's ire, for Thomas Jennings was a man who fulfilled all these conditions.

Another of the means by which John Knight secured his

exclusive control over the business was his use of the apprenticeship system. By his sole exercise of binding servants to the firm, he evaded competition from either partners or manager, in spite of the fact that they contributed equal shares in the undertaking. That he had been accustomed to this method of control by family tradition counted for much in continuing the practice in the new industry: besides he was following the precedent set by Robert Aldworth in the management of Bristol's first sugar house. Clearly Knight had no sympathy with the attempt to establish industrial freedom in Commonwealth times consequent on the breakdown of the customary machinery of the apprenticeship system. He stood for continuance of the practice of contract between master and parent, signed in the presence of a person of civic authority. Moreover Knight's method may have consolidated the system in the local sugar industry, which was only just establishing itself in his lifetime, for, throughout the next century and a half, it was steadily practised by the masters in the trade, especially for the admission of men who might aspire ultimately to management. Throughout the twenty-six years of his authority, John Knight succeeded in exercising this power in order to discriminate between the two different types of entrants into his industrial establishment. On the one hand we have the two Jennings brother—Thomas and Philip—and Thomas Cole, the son of a local merchant¹; and on the other, John Mason² and Davy Richards³ who, in the fifties, were trained 'in the art of

¹ A.L., 9 Oct. 1654: Thomas Cole, son of Thomas Cole, of Bristol, merchant, deceased, was bound apprentice to John Knight, junior, of Bristol, and Mary, his wife, for 7 years.

B.R., 19 August 1667: Thomas Cole, merchant, was admitted to the freedom of Bristol on the grounds of having served an apprenticeship with John Knight of the sugar house.

² A.L., 31 Oct. 1655: John Mason, son of John Mason, late of Bristol, chirurgion, deceased was bound apprentice to John Knight, junior, merchant, of Bristol and Mary, his wife, for 7 years, to be taught and instructed in the art of the refining of sugar. Note not in B.R.

³ A.L., 19 Jan. 1656: Davy Richards, son of Richard Richards of Carmarthen, was bound apprentice to John Knight, merchant, of Bristol, to be educated in the art of sugar maker. Note not in B.R.

the refining of sugar,' and in the last decade of his life his last apprentice, John Watkins,¹ 'as a sugar baker'—clearly for technical training and not management.

THOMAS JENNINGS *versus* THOMAS COLE

Despite, and perhaps because of, a similarity of social background between Thomas Jennings and Thomas Cole, there would appear to be a human story of rivalry between these men for the post of manager of the Great House. This emerges from their conduct when advancing their respective chances by a policy of marriage, for whereas Thomas Jennings favoured Mary, his master's daughter, Thomas Cole, encouraged the marriage of his own daughter Martha, to Sir John Knight, the cousin and rival of John Knight, junior. Thus alongside the major contest of the cousins, there ran another between the seconds who backed the rival partners in the firm, so that the sway of the battle between the principals had repercussions in the ranks of their supporters. We can trace the varying stages of success between the parties in the legal decisions and the family papers. The cold-shouldering of Sir John by John, junior, in the sixties had a counterpart in the fortunes of Thomas Cole, whose enemy took the opportunity of inviting his brother Philip Jennings to Bristol, with a view of finding him, employment at the Great House. And the final ousting of Sir John in 1668 paved the way for another Jennings to seek a fortune in the west country. This time it was James who, in the seventies, followed his brother's example and married another of John Knight's daughters. It would be difficult to decide which of the Jennings brothers was the most astute—we have noted business perspicacity in every branch of the family—and James crowned his achievement by his appointment as his father-in-law's agent on his Nevis estate, with a dowry of £1,200, the equivalent of half the plantation. The

¹ B.R., 4 Feb. 1680. John Watkins, sugar baker, was admitted, having been the apprentice of Alderman John Knight, Esq., deceased. 4 shillings and 6 pence paid as a legal fee.

continued successes of the Jennings brothers meant the continued subordination of Thomas Cole: the Jennings, like their master, knew all the arts of holding a vanquished foe. The consequence was that John Knight, in his declining years, preferred offering the Great House and the refinery at a rental to an outsider—Richard Lane¹—to softening his heart to Thomas Cole, who still cherished the ambition of entering the Great House as its master. That this was so can be proved by his eventual purchase of it from Richard Lane in 1696 for the sum of £1,300. By that time, Thomas Cole, in his late middle age, was planning a career for his son, Lawford,² and after a decade at the Great House, realised its limitations as a site, especially for the distillery which both of them contemplated adding to the refinery.³ So to them fell the responsibility of ending its existence as an industrial unit, and selling it to Edward Colston for his new school.

THOMAS JENNINGS, 1669–1684

Thomas Jennings, had been baulked in his attempts to invest his capital by the two decrees of 1664 and 1668; but such a large and useful fund of money bulked more and more prominently in John junior's mind. Whereas before 1660, he had found opportunities on countless occasions to use it to cover emergency demands in all branches of this all-embracing business—whether in overseas ventures, in local trade along the coast or to Ireland, or in the industrial side—in the immediate future, he welcomed its use to replace Sir John's lost capital. Jennings could hardly expect it to be employed in the firm itself, for profits, being on the 1657 scale, would presumably be ploughed into the business by now, but he might reasonably expect it to be used in the purchase of a sugar plantation in one

¹ B.R., 16 Oct. 1654. Richard Lane, son of George Lane, was admitted to burgess-rights, having been apprenticed as a grocer to Thomas Goldney.

² B.R., 30 Oct. 1712. Lawford Cole, son of Thomas Cole, Esq., deceased, was admitted to burgess-rights.

³ Great House deeds, dated 28 Aug. 1696. Indenture between Richard Lane and Thomas Cole.

of the West Indian islands, which were then being laid out for that purpose. The advantage of maintaining a constant supply of raw brown sugars would not be missed by Jennings or Knight: indeed in a joint enterprise of this character, both colleagues had other contributions to make. Thomas could call on the services of his two brothers, Philip and James, for help at home and if need be in the colonies and John Knight, now sole proprietor and manager-in-chief, could exploit his substantial contacts in the Council Chamber and in the Merchant Venturers' Society to aid the scheme. Together the four could increase fourfold the supply of indentured servants who were being sent abroad to the Virginian tobacco estates and to Antillian plantations at this time. Besides Thomas was fast advancing to the position of management himself. From 1667 the entries in the local Audit Account Books show that since 1667 he had been living in a private house which he had built himself, under St. Michael's hills on a hitherto void piece of ground on Stoneyhill, overlooking the Great House.¹ He thus left the master's domicile for one of his own which he established into an office, and this place was still being referred to in local documents as 'Mr Jennings' house and office' three years after his death (1684).²

How reliable Thomas Jennings was at his job may be inferred from the new activities which his master could afford to indulge in. In 1661 Knight opened up a career in the City Council and distinguished himself so admirably that after nine years' service, he was called up to fill the responsible office of Mayor. During his strenuous year of duty 1670, we can see Jennings taking most of the responsibility at the Great House, and with such success that his master resolved to continue

¹ Bristol Archives Dept. *Chamberlain's Journal*, 31 Oct. 1664: B.B., 22 Jan. 1663. Audits, 1666-7, folio 21, to 1683. During these years Thomas Jennings paid a rental of 12 shillings a year to the Corporation. After 1683 onwards his executors paid the rentals.

² *Somerset Arch. Soc.*, xxxi, p. 45, pt. 2. Thomas Jennings' administration, 11 March 1679-80; also 'Mr Jennings' house and office' mentioned in Bristol Poll Book: St. Augustine's ward 1684.

his public service as Alderman. Meanwhile Jennings consolidated his own position and those of his brothers.

Amongst all the figures connected with the refinery in the eighth decade, these Jennings brothers stand out by reason of their qualities as sound business men, not of the showy type of Bristolians like the Knight-Cary combination, but of the hard-headed, hard-bargaining ambitious sort, with a quiet and effective determination to operate behind the scenes whether in the Bristol house or on a West Indian plantation. In other words, they were men of executive ability who succeeded in keeping out of the limelight of publicity so fraught with danger in this pioneering and transitional period. By the qualities of reliability and pertinacity, by the use of money, they ingratiated themselves into the Knight family and married two of its daughters: and by a clear-sighted appreciation of the situation, they garnered to themselves the key-positions in the refinery and in the plantation, thus co-ordinating the business in sugars on both sides of the Atlantic in this new type of sugar house—the first in what we may call the West Indian phase of the city's sugar industry.

THE JENNINGS BROTHERS—PHILIP AND JAMES

This view of the Jennings brothers is based on documentary evidence, the only source of our information about them. That both the Jennings brothers came from Hayes in Middlesex is testified by the apprenticeship records in the Corporation archives: Thomas, a fatherless child was entered on 10th September 1653, and Philip on 1st January 1656 when he entered on the good name of his elder brother and without a bond. Both were apprenticed to 'John Knight of the sugar house' and his wife Mary. It is on the evidence of John Knight, the son of 'John Knight of the sugar house' in his complaint before the Chancery Court (in 1680) that we gain our information about James Jennings, the third brother in Bristol. Here we learn that, in 1675, on the solemnization of his marriage to Mary, the daughter of John Knight, junior, he received a dowry of £1,200 a half of an estate in Nevis belonging to his father-in-law.

Knowing the latter, we suspect that this gift was contingent on James' taking his wife to the Nevis plantation where they were to act as agents in the Knight interest.¹ Apparently all these conditions were complied with since the evidence was couched in the past tense: moreover, there is a faint suggestion that the other moiety of the estate, which was valued at £1,600, belonged to the Jennings family. Unfortunately there is no mention of the acreage, nor, on any future occasion, of James in his capacity as estate agent; but the foundations of a system of integration in the business unit were certainly laid by the activities of these Jennings brothers.

Further documentary evidence concerning the joint efforts of Knight and the Jennings brothers in a co-operative scheme to purchase a West Indian sugar plantation comes to light in the 'Servants to Plantations,' volume housed in the Bristol Corporation Archives Department. This shows that Philip had hardly arrived in the city (1656) and had certainly not finished his seven years' apprenticeship before the City Fathers permitted him to indenture two youths for service in Virginia, the first for six and the second for four years:² both cases occurred in the last year of the Commonwealth. Seven years later, his brother Thomas indentured another to serve in Nevis, presumably on his sugar plantations, for six years.³ Lucky indeed was he and all the others who had chosen Nevis, for this was the one island of the group which was free from raids from the Caribs, and free too from the welter of blood which characterised these years of struggle between the English and the French.

¹ Chancery Law Case, C 512. Complaint of 'Sir' John Knight against Mary,
46
the second wife of John Knight, junior. date 1680.

² Bristol Archives Dept., 'Servants to Plantations,' p. 332, '7 Oct. 1659, John Wind of Chard, Somerset, was apprenticed to Philip Jennings, merchant, for 4 years to serve in Virginia.' and p. 343, '18 Nov. 1659, Benjamin Maudlin of Wedgbury, Staffordshire, yeoman, was apprenticed to Philip Jennings, merchant, for 6 years to serve in Virginia.'

³ *ibid.*, p. 38, '5 Oct. 1664, Jonathan Phillips was apprenticed to Thomas Jennings of Bristol, merchant, for 6 yrs., to serve in Nevis.'

At the same time Knight became interested in the same scheme and sent two men to Barbadoes for four years:¹ they were a Somerset carpenter from Taunton and Robert Phimery, a tailor. Thus before the end of the Commonwealth, Bristol interests in the sugar world were concentrating on the West Indies as a possible centre of economic exploitation, and without doubt, the Knight-Cary-Jennings combination was scheming a place in the island-trade which metropolitan merchants were striving to monopolise.

Bristol traders continued to gather strength during the next decade, and among the local firms petitioning the Privy Council for permission to send goods to the Leeward Islands were John Knight and Shershaw Cary² who, in 1667, sent food and clothing to Nevis; while John Knight and Co. in the following year sent 150 horses to the Leewards.³ And as the years passed, this trade flourished with the sale of cloths, hats, shoes, furniture, swords, iron tools, saddlery, firearms and various

¹ *ibid.*, p. 178. '16 Jan. 1658-9, Nicholas Hagley of Taunton, Somerset, carpenter, was apprenticed to John Knight, junior, for 4 years, to serve in Barbadoes,' and p. 359, '18 March 1659-60, Robert Phimery, taylor, was apprenticed to John Knight, junior, merchant, for 4 years to serve in Barbadoes.'

The following are instances of Bristol merchant families associated with specific West Indian islands:—

Barbadoes: Gonning, John, 'a Barbadoes Planter,' see entries in 'Servants to Plantations.'

Gorges, Ferdinando, 'a Barbadoes Planter.'

Dapwell, *c.* 1690.

Jamaica: Day, and Hort families, see Lewins Mead Account Book, *c.* 1742.

Elbridge family. Swymmer family, A.L., 12 Oct. 1691.

Montserrat: Freeman, Wm. of Fawley, Co. Bucks. (P.C.C. 199 Poley, 1707) Webb, Nathaniel, p. 45, n. 93. *B. and G.A.S.*, Vol. 65.

Nevis: Pinney, Azariah, 1695, see Pinney Account Books, Racedown, Dorset.

Prigg, Wm., 'Servants to Plantations,' 1680.

Knight, John 'Sir,' 1680. *ibid.*

² Acts of the Privy Council. Col. Series, 1613-80, p. 441 or f.723 (14), 15 Feb. 1667.

³ *ibid.*, 806. 30 Oct. 1668.

utensils employed in the manufacture of sugar, such as copper stills, ladles and skimmers.¹

To back this trade in essentials, Bristol merchants gathered official help in the person of Wheeler, the Leeward Islands Governor who, in 1672, devised a policy to attract a new type of capitalist—such as the Bristol merchants were—to the colony of St. Kitts, where he was entrusted with the restitution of English property by the French in conformity with the Peace of Breda. Wheeler's endeavour to encourage the large planter interests in sugar as against the small planter interests in tobacco was fully appreciated by west country capitalists in the persons of John Knight, Jennings, Cary and Ferdinando Gorges, whose plan to introduce Scottish settlers into these islands is well known.² This scheme, dated 1673, underlines the help and interest which the Gorges family continued to take in the Great House, twenty years after another member of it, Richard Gorges, had first introduced John Knight to Dame Elizabeth Gorges. And when we realise that Ferdinando Gorges was acting as Governor Stapleton's agent in the Leeward Islands, we see how Bristol's cause was being sustained industrially at home, and in the fields of cultivation in the West Indies. The Great House, Bristol, took a pioneering place in this new movement, and the promoters of the West Indian sugar trade in Bristol deservedly win lasting fame in local history for maintaining her trade against her competitors in London.

There is, however, another example of 'push' characteristic of the Knight family in the eighties, when, on the death of Governor Stapleton in 1685, Sir John Knight—the one-time partner and cousin of John Knight, junior—took upon himself to press his claim as the next Governor of the Leewards. As a Montserrat merchant, he reckoned to understand the welfare of the region, and as King Charles' diligent servant in rounding up Puritan sectaries in Bristol during his year of mayoralty 1663, he made representations to the king for that post and

¹ Bristol Port Books, 1671 series.

² Higham: *The Leeward Islands*, 1660-88, p. 236.

received a favourable hearing, which, however, was counter-weighted by official and planter counter-charges to the Privy Council. In the end, Sir John's hope receded into the background, but Bristol's cause had been keenly contested by a Knight and one who had previously taken his share as a part-founder of a sugar works in his native city.¹

Such are the probable series of actions and negotiations linking up the careers of these two families—the Knights and the Jennings—over a quarter of a century, entailing joint-purchases of land, property and business, sometimes in East Anglia, sometimes in Bristol, and sometimes in the West Indies.

JOHN KNIGHT AND WORKING CONDITIONS AT THE REFINERY

The second category into which the last three apprentices are grouped was the training of the actual workmen. Over these, Knight exercised a direct control so as to prevent them from offering their services as journeymen to any rival firm which might spring up. By contrast with Knight's first three apprentices—the Jennings brothers and Thomas Cole—to whom the City fathers conceded both apprenticeship and burgess-ship on the grounds that they were marked out for master service to the community, there was this important difference in the case of the last three trainees that, being for artisan service, they were granted apprenticeship but that burgess-ship was withheld. These were the demands of the governing class in Bristol even under the Commonwealth—views which were stoutly held by the same mercantile class who continued to wield power under the restored Stuarts, and were specially noticeable in this new industry. That Knight had no direct share in putting these views in practice during the Commonwealth, we know for certain since he was not a member of the Corporation until 1661. After that date, we have no doubt that he exercised his influence since his two workmen's cases for recognition as citizens came up for official discussion. Thus

¹ *ibid.*, p. 217-8.

realising that his new enterprise in sugar required protection from a prospective rival partnership, he demanded the application of the Elizabethan Apprenticeship clauses in spite of the prevailing feeling of the times being against industrial control in business, and in spite of the fact that administrative machinery over them had lately broken down. This was Knight's point of view in the fifties when he brought his first four apprentices before the mayor of Bristol on the occasion of their introduction to the city. But by the time that their seven years' service had been done circumstances had changed. Jennings' bond money was ready for use in 1660: Cole belonged to a mercantile family, and so these two families were among the socially acceptable. This however, was not true of Knight's apprentices—Mason, the son of a deceased local surgeon (1655–1662), and Davy Richards (1656–1663) the son of a Carmarthen man. With the approach of the year 1663, Knight had changed his point of view regarding public service, sought a seat on the Common Council and a voice in the affairs of a great city. Now he lifted up his voice in withholding burgess-rights from his two artisan trainees. Thus he secured a control over his workmen so that, having taught them his trade secrets, he could thereby prevent them from obtaining other service in the city.

That Mason and Richards found employment in the firm, and accommodation at the Great House we have no doubt from the nature of the circumstances. From the documentary point of view, we have found no evidence of their existence in the city during their journeymanhip, and the only reference we possess arises from the fact that Knight did not receive another apprentice until the last decade of his life. This occurred in 1672 when one John Watkins began a normal period of training which ended in 1680—a year after his master's death. In this case, the Corporation records¹ show that he received his grant of burgess-rights in 1680, a year after Knight's death.

¹ Bristol Archives Dept. B.R. 4 Feb. 1680. John Watkins received the freedom of Bristol; see also Audits 1679–80. He paid 4 shillings and 6 pence, the legal fee for his citizenship.

We do not know how Knight paid them for their services, either as journeyman or as chief sugar boiler. Their rewards cannot have been far different from those of neighbouring and rival sugar houses in the following decades. Between 1672 and 1682 John Hine, a local sugar refiner in the St. Thomas St. area, paid Roger Newport, a journeyman in his service, between £12 10s and £13 annually,¹ and in 1666, there is a statement that the chief workman or sugar boiler at the Whitson Court sugar house—not a stone's throw from the Great House—was paid £72 yearly—£60 for his skill as an efficient workman, and £12 for his board.²

Another interesting question about working conditions within a sugar house concerns the number of workpeople employed on the site, 'serving men' as they were called in the poll books of the time. Obviously the number varied with the size of the workshop, which in the early decades of this infant industry, was on a small scale. Only five were employed at the Great House³ in the year 1691, and Whitson Court sugar house, seven⁴. These small numbers suggest that they might be housed easily under the same roof as their master, and knowing the spacious proportions of the two houses we are not surprised to find mention, in the case of the Great House, of the 'workmen's chamber' as containing three bedsteads. This reference occurs in the 1674 inventory of furniture and equipment of the entire mansion, showing that after twenty years' existence as an industrial unit, and after thirteen dwellings had been erected out of Thomas Jennings' capital in 1661, Knight still found it necessary to offer accommodation under his own roof for extraneous workers.

When we come to a consideration of the personnel who lived under these arrangements made by Knight, it is not easy to reckon all the number of people indicated by the documents

¹ 1672-82, Jurie Book. Bristol Archives Dept.

² Chancery Law Case, 5 451, 1666.

52

³ 1691 St. Augustine's Poll Book. Bristol Archives Dept.

⁴ *B. and G.A.S. Trans.*, Vol. 65 (1944). 'Whitson Court Sugar House, 1665-1824,' p. 36.

and the accommodation offered. Until the building of the thirteen dwellings out of Jennings' capital in 1661, we can reasonably expect Thomas Jennings and Thomas Cole to have lived within the master's family circle as under time-honoured custom; so too we can presume that the two artisan apprentices, Mason and Richards, were accommodated in the workmen's chamber, at least till 1663 by which time they would have assumed journeyman status and a wage of £12 yearly, which would have qualified them to occupy two of the thirteen new houses on the estate. But who, by name, were the remaining eleven people who would find shelter in the other houses? We can only think that they were labourers, since poll book lists for the period do not show that any more qualified people lived on the estate. In that case, they must have been the hewers of wood and the drawers of water—men without burgess status, whose duties entailed such heavy and back-breaking exercises as clay-mixing, lime-shovelling, fire-stoking, unpacking and unloading West Indian hogsheads, tierces and barrels of raw sugar cane, and refilling the Bristol refined sugars of various grades and qualities. Then too the carters and wharf-hands associated with this overseas industry must have been housed somewhere. Only in this way can we hope to fill the discrepancy between the number of accredited employees at the Great House and the number of houses built on the estate in the early years of the Jennings régime.

THE WATER SUPPLY

In passing from conditions of service and accommodation to processes of refining, we are fortunate in finding first-hand documents which have aided materially in our solution of the problems raised by this great pioneer venture. Especially interesting are four separate sets of inventories of furniture and appointments of the domestic quarters and the mechanical contrivances and utensils used in the newly established industry. One noticeable difference between the first and second schedules consists of the addition of tools and gadgets connected with

each room and process, occasioned by the setting up of the works within the Great House. Whereas the first list, dated 1653, itemised the 'utensils of household, and household stuff' in the various chambers, closets, wardrobes and gallery of the mansion as known to the inmates from the Youngs to the Gorges, the next one, dated 1674, indicated the extent of the change which took place as a result of the conversion of the premises into an industrial unit. Thus we notice the inclusion of coolers, vats, a leaden pump, a cistern, items specially connected with the liquid processes used in the sugar house. It was the continuous use of water in almost every process of refining that made the question of water supply of the first importance. In fact it was the fundamental reason for the choice of this property as a refinery.

The water supply at the Great House was originated in a spring which gushed forth from Brandon hill in the immediate vicinity of the mansion. During the middle ages, this spring had provided the Carmelite friary on the site with such an abundance of water that the Prior had made an agreement with the parishioners of St. John's, across the Froom, for a constant supply of the water to their conduit outside the church. This was done by attaching a 'feather' or brass tap to the main pipe in Pipe Lane, by which the parishioners' water could flow away to its destination. So matters stood at the time of the Dissolution and destruction of the House in the 16th century. It was not until the Elizabethan mansion which took its place was converted into a sugar house that trouble began between the two authorities—Knight as tenant and the parishioners of St. John. The first complaint of the parishioners to the Corporation in 1653 was answered by the city officials with an unwarranted and unbounded assertion of power by claiming that the city had always possessed rights over the spring water. Therefore they reversed the distribution of the water by causing the city plumber to place the 'feather supply' of water to the refinery, and the main flow towards St. John's conduit. Knight, being a newcomer to the city in 1653, humbly submitted to the Corporation's decree: and installed two water

cisterns in the work-house, and the 'leaden pump with an iron handle' in the wash-house. This is the reason for the inclusion of these important items in the 1674 schedule and their omission from the previous one of a generation before.

How the contention fared during the lifetime of John Knight, we can only guess. Knowing the character of his main political activities in the Council Chamber, his dominating passion to make his refinery the crowning success of his career, we express no surprise on reading in the next deed that frequent disputes had occurred with John Knight; nor do we miss the observation that the complainants had never succeeded in bringing him to book during his lifetime. That Knight had changed the feather and replaced it by one of a wider bore would appear a justifiable inference from the fact that there was attached to the 1679 deed a sample of the brass pipe which the churchwardens had fitted anew to the Pipe Lane main. No sooner was Knight dead than the wardens for 1679 once more had their rights confirmed in another deed with another sample of pipe attached.¹

No more is heard of the quarrel during the existence of the sugar house, but we have no doubt that this agreement of 1679 prevented the refinery from expanding, notably when Thomas Cole in 1696 contemplated the addition of a distillery to the existing premises—a new practice in local sugar houses at the turn of the century. Thus this agreement sealed the fate of the refinery and determined Cole's decision to transfer the business and equipment to Lewins Mead and later to Duck Lane.

John Knight's character, like his career, developed with advancing years. Being heir to a family tradition, born of achievement steadily ruptured in Tudor and Stuart times, he battled through phase and counter-phase in middle life until he won fame and fortune, solely acquired as the result of his own efforts. In this way, he gained first place in a local race to

¹ Hirst, *History of the Church of St. John the Baptist, Bristol*, p. 65.

I saw this 1679 deed, hanging in the vestry of St. John's Church in 1923, rough the kindness of Mr H. C. M. Hirst, A.R.I.B.A.

Eldorado where Bristol merchants in the two following centuries, succeeded in holding off their trade rivals, the Londoners, who had hoped to gain mastery of the situation. Bristol sugar bakers who were allied to their local counterparts, the West Indian merchants, have been all too long in paying their tribute to this stalwart promoter of their prosperity.

Knight's character and circumstance enabled him to lay hold of the Great House, its manufacturing utensils, its equipment and its account books, and so to lay the foundation of his great wealth. He owned between £5,000 and £6,000, besides jewellery, plate and an estate in Westbury-on-Trym on the western outskirts of Bristol. Four years before his death, he bestowed on his youngest and favourite son Joseph, his 705 acres of fenland in the Isle of Ely as well as his plantation in Nevis; an astonishing accumulation of riches gathered in the short space of 25 years. It was gained at a heavy price. The tightness of his hold over every department of the business is evidenced by the uproar which was let loose at his decease, when every member of the family and every business associate let fly against his opposite number; the in-laws against each other, the parish wardens of St. John against Joseph, the son and legatee, John Cary against the same Joseph, and Sir John, the eldest son, against his step-mother. Legal proceedings and legal evidence provide us with an inestimable source of first-hand information about the history of the house, its organization and its business which otherwise would have been unobtainable. We know little of his personal life, but one detail shows him as failing to follow the common trend of his time, whether from his Puritanical inclinations or from his personal dislike of his pretentious cousin—Sir John—we cannot tell, but he never used armorial bearings. That the family possessed such bearings, we know for certain, but John is never referred to as having made use of them.

(NOTE: It is hoped to print short papers by Mr I. V. Hall on the Latch, Gorges and Jennings families in subsequent numbers of the TRANSACTIONS. Ed.)

Abbreviations in Footnotes

A.L.	= Apprentices Lists	} in Bristol Archives Department
B.R.	= Burgess Rolls	
O.F.B.A.	= Orders for Binding Apprentices	
B.B.	= Bargain Book	
Bo.B.	= Bond Book	
<i>B. and G.A.S. Trans.</i>	= Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society Transactions.	
P.R.O.	= Public Record Office.	

AUTHORITIES

(Unprinted)

In the main there are two sets of documents, both original in source, upon which this essay is based: A. Local, and B. London, although special mention must be made of the Church Baptismal and Burial books of Churchill parish, Somerset which were inspected for me by the kindness of Dr J. W. Walker, O.B.E., F.R.C.S., F.S.A.

A. 1. *Property deeds*: the history of the sugar house depends for its general structure on the property deeds of the Colston Hall which are in the custody of the Merchant Venturers' Society of Bristol. These I saw in the 1920's by the kindness of Mr W. W. Ward, the Treasurer, and more recently by the courtesy of Miss G. Whitaker, the present Secretary. These documents, known as Bundle I, cover the period 1568-1769, and comprise some 30 parchments and papers, containing information about the occupiers of the property both before and after its use as a sugar house (1654-1708), whether as a private residence under the Youngs (c. 1570-1613), William Claxton and Sir Hugh Smyth of Long Ashton (1614-1653), or whether as a school for boys (1708-1859), when, under the foundation of Edward Colston, the famous Bristol philanthropist. Thus the story of the site, after the dissolution of the Carmelite house called the White Fryers 1540, to the erection of the Sir John Young's Elizabethan mansion, called the Lower House, and the latter's continued existence as such till 1653 is contained in the deeds which relate to the following owners:—John Pine, the sometime Prior of the Friary, Sir John and Sir Robert Young, Roger Horton, William Claxton, Sir Hugh Smyth and his son Hugh who married Dame Elizabeth Gorges.

The century 1540-1653 saw the demolition of the Friary, the erection of Young's lower house on St. Augustine's Back on two plots of ground, the first on the site of the present Colston Hall and the second on land in the immediate neighbourhood whereon extensions to the property were added in Jacobean times, the profits of which the owner was permitted to take by legal agreement. Even then there was an orchard and

a garden. It was during the Stuart period that the deeds refer to the enhanced valuation of the site; in 1613, £660 is mentioned as the sale price to William Claxton, who in the next year sold it for a twelve pound gain to Hugh Smyth. And in 1653, Dame Elizabeth Gorges released it to John Knight, junior, for £100 fine and a yearly rental of £30 for 41 years. Thus the property at St. Augustine's went for a similar figure at the same period to that for which Whitson Court went when it was converted into a sugar house: and with the conversion of the two mansions the character of this side of the river Froom changed. This was a prelude to other developments in the next half century when other warehouses and works were erected on St. Augustine's Back and Dighton's brewery in St. James' district: and so the localisation of industry along the banks of the Froom began in Commonwealth and Later Stuart times.

2. Another equally important set of records is in the possession of the Archives Department of the Corporation whose custodian, Miss Elizabeth Ralph, has always afforded me the greatest assistance in reading the same. They consist of the following:—

- a. Apprentices Lists.
- b. Burgess Rolls.
- c. Audit books, 1663-1707 and 1703, for Sir John Knight at the Royal Fort.
- d. Bargain books, 1663-1672, p. 4 (04335) and p. 17.
- e. Grand Jurie books, 1662-1664.
- f. Servants to Plantations, 1658-9, p. 178.
- g. Bristol Poll Tax Assessments, St. Augustine's Ward, and St. Philip and St. Jacob's Ward, 1687-1708, for John Cary.

That the proprietors and interested parties connected with the Great House sugar bakery lived in the neighbourhood of the works can be shown from these Tax Assessments. These valuable sources of information refer to the amounts of taxes assessed on every ward of Bristol during the later years of the 17th century and show what amounts were charged on the families living at the time. Thus for St. Augustine's Ward, 1687-1704, we come across the names of the following families connected with the sugar house:—the Knights, Lanes, Jennings, Coles, Harts, James Gallop and the Swymmers.

John Knight, junior, died in 1679, and Joseph, his son, retired to Matson Manor in North Gloucestershire, but these records show that a Mrs Knight and a Jonathan Knight continued to live in the Ward; the latter, described as an esquire, who lived at Canons Marsh.

The same records refer to the Lanes who lived under Richard's roof, viz. Susanna, his wife and five children; and in the year 1691, we find an interesting reference to nine in the family in addition to *five* serving

men; the names of many of these can be found by reference to the Corporation's other records such as the Apprentices Lists and Burgess Rolls.

3. *Church* Baptismal, Marriage and Burial registers afford exact data concerning members within the family group. Before the war, Temple Church Vestry went to great expense in cataloguing their parchments and leases for the use of the researcher. One lease *re* Richard Puppin, Ab. 167 (1) shows the existence of a sugar workman not mentioned in the Apprentices Lists, showing that he was labourer with no status in the eyes of the Corporation.

St. John's Churchwardens too gave me access to their valuable records and legal agreements. It was from the 1679 legal covenant concerning the quarrel of the parishioners and Joseph Knight over the use of the Brandon Hill spring that I first realised the significance of (lime-bearing) spring water to the sugar refining industry. Throughout the existence of the sugar house at St. Augustine's Back 1654-1679 whilst the Knights bore rule, the relations of the St. John's parishioners and the Knights were strained indeed it seems likely that Thomas Cole, realising that a deficiency of water, occasioned by this legal agreement of 1679, would prevent his installing a rum distillery on the site—as was customary at Bristol sugar bakeries at this period—determined to end the existence of the house as an industrial unit (1708).

St. Nicholas Church records too served the useful purpose of identifying some members of the Cary family.

4. *Bristol Central Library*: B. 9148 Agreement made by Edward Colston, Esq :(Copy) 1708.

(unprinted)

London repositories possess many valuable records, e.g. (P.R.O.):—

- a. Chancery Law cases (Bridges' Division).
C2 $\frac{K3}{61}$ 15 May 1618.
C5 $\frac{454}{108}$ John Bullock *v.* Sir John Knight (1681).
C5 $\frac{459}{97}$ John Cary *v.* Joseph Knight (1682) and Richard Lane.
C5 $\frac{512}{46}$ John Knight *v.* Mary Knight (1681) and Joseph Knight.
C5 $\frac{510}{48}$ 30 Nov. 1681.
- b. Bristol Port books, 1137 (1), 1137 (2), Series 1668–71.
- c. British Museum: mss. John Cary's papers. Add. mss. 5540 New Folio 58. (Old no. 56) to 95 (Old no. 93).
- d. *College of Arms*, Visitations of Somerset 1683. These I have inspected with the kindness of Sir Algar Howard, Garter King of Arms.
- e. *Middle Temple* records. I am specially grateful to Mr H. A. C. Sturgess, Librarian and Keeper of the Records for searching his registers regarding the two Latches.
- f. Pinney Papers at Racedown. Azariah Pinney's Account books, 1689–1693. These I studied at Racedown by the courtesy of Lady Pinney.

(Printed)

Printed references to the firm of John Knight, sugar baker, and to the other founders are few indeed in local histories. Occasionally we find a reference or two in Latimer's *Annals of Bristol in the 17th Century*.

As we have found no plans of the site either in the property deeds or in Corporation records, we have had to use two contemporary drawings:—(a) (1673) Millerd's Plan of Bristol, inset, and (b) Colston Boys' School, about 1840.

(c) Diderot's *Dictionnaire des Sciences*—planches—Tom. 3. Article, 'Distillateur.'

Printed Books

1. Beaven, Rev. A. B., *Bristol Lists*.
2. Latimer: *Annals of Bristol in the 17th Century*.
3. *Colonial State Papers*, VI, 1744, 1745.
4. *Jefferson MSS*, II, 99, 106, 110, 157, 166, 183, 310.
5. *Acts of the Privy Council*. Colonial Series, 1613-80, p. 441, or f. 723 (14) 15 Feb. 1667.
6. *Ditto* (f. 806) 30 Oct. 1668.
7. *Treasury Papers*, Vol. 1, 1660-1667, p. 568, 17 Jan., 1663-4.
8. Higham, C. S., *Leeward Islands*, 1660-1688.
9. Wells, Samuel, *History of the Bedford Level* (1830).
10. Darby, H. C., *Drainage of the Fens, Cambridge*. Economic Series.
11. 'The Fen Office Documents', by W. M. Palmer, *Proc. Camb. Antiq. Soc.*, Vol. 38 (1939).
12. *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica*; Vol. VIII, pt. 4., pp. 88-108. for the genealogy of the Jennings family.