

CHARLES II, SIR CHARLES HARBORD AND WELTON

It is possible that Charles II visited Welton on two occasions. During the Restoration Sir Charles Harbord, the Duchy Surveyor, lived at the Manor House, and, as we have seen, it was here Charles heard the peal of cracked bells. Some twelve years earlier, in 1651, there was a price on Charles's head of £1000 and he was for several weeks on the run between Worcester and the south coast. Tradition has it that he was hidden for some time at the Old Farm in Welton.

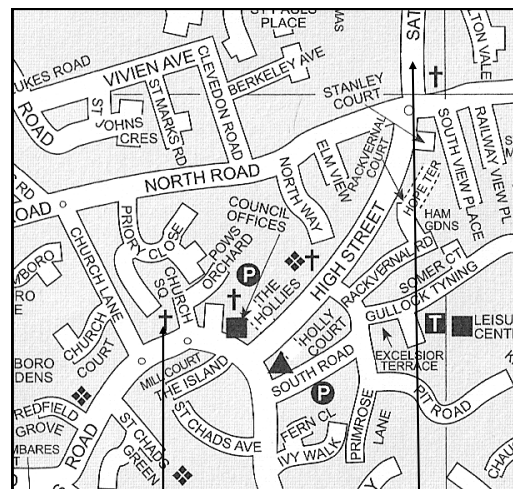
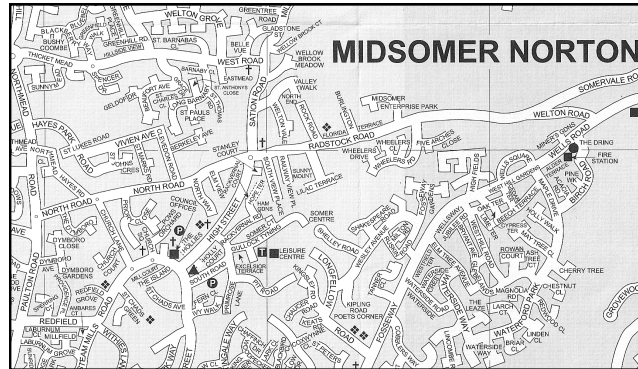


The Old Farm, Welton, seen on the left

Sir Charles Harbord (1596 -1679) was the son of William Harbord of Welton Manor. He was married twice, first to Anne Tyen and then to Mary van Aelst, and he was knighted on May 29th 1636. He was the Member of Parliament for Launceston in 1661 and again, briefly, in 1679. He held numerous offices including surveyor-general (1631-1642) and he served as a commissioner on many committees. He was one of the most active MPs of the Cavalier Parliament and was appointed to no less than 694 committees. He delivered 65 reports and made 123 recorded speeches in Parliament.

His father, William, was married at St. John the Baptist Church and, on his death, was buried there on June 13th 1616. There is a memorial to William Harbord on the interior North facing wall.

WHERE TO FIND ST. JOHN'S CHURCH AND KING CHARLES II'S STATUE



ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

To WELTON

CHARLES II and MIDSOMER NORTON



There are familiar and recognisable features in the exteriors of most church buildings - a steeple or spire or tower, stained glass windows, gargoyles, impressive stonework with detailed carving, wind vanes and so on. But wander round the exterior of St. John the Baptist, Midsomer Norton and gaze up at the south facing tower wall and you will see the remarkable statue of no less a person than King Charles II, standing proudly in a niche below the clock face. A little eroded now from the effects of the weather over the centuries, nevertheless he is recognisable and stunning with his robes and crown. How did his statue come to be erected here and what is Charles's connection with the ancient town?

KING CHARLES II

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Charles was born on May 29th 1630 at St James's Palace in London. His parents were the reigning monarch, Charles I and his wife, Henrietta Maria.

During the Civil War, 1642 -45, Charles lived with his father in Oxford.

Charles's father, King Charles I, was executed at Whitehall in 1649 at the climax of the English Civil War. There then followed a period known as the English Interregnum or the English Commonwealth and the country, led by Oliver Cromwell, was to all intents and purposes a republic. In 1650 Charles landed in Scotland, having accepted the Scottish Covenanters' offer to make him King. He was crowned King of Scotland at Scone on January 1st 1651. An attempt to invade England was ended on September 3rd 1651 when Cromwell defeated Charles at the Battle of Worcester. Charles escaped, according to legend, by hiding in an oak tree and he fled to Europe, where he spent the next nine years in exile.

Following the death of Cromwell in 1658, a political crisis was resolved by the decision to restore the monarchy, and Charles was invited to return to Britain. On his 30th birthday, in 1660, he was received enthusiastically in London, and was crowned on April 23rd 1661 at Westminster Abbey.

A series of political and religious plots dogged his 25 years reign. However, the plots to murder him and plots to promote either the re-established Church of England or Roman Catholicism; and the 1665 Great Plague of London and the 1666 Great Fire of London did not tone down the return to a much less restricted and freer country from the times of Cromwell and the Puritans. Indeed Charles was nicknamed the Merrie Monarch. Restoration comedy was a keynote of the times and Nell Gwyn was just one of at least seven mistresses Charles favoured.

Charles died on February 6th 1685, aged 54, and he was succeeded by his brother who became James II.



King Charles in his Coronation robes

CHARLES'S LINKS WITH MIDSOMER NORTON

The Tower of St. John the Baptist's Church is a three stage West tower; the lower stage is probably 15th Century freestone, the upper stages 17th Century ashlar. There was originally a peal of eight bells, augmented in 1976 to twelve bells. Three of the original bells were the gift of Charles II. The Treble and the No.2 bells have inscribed on them, 'The Gift of King Charles the Second T.B.F. 1750' and the No. 3 bell has 'Twas Charles the Second our gracious King was the chief cause we eight bells ring. T.B.F.' (T.B.F. 1950 stands for Thomas Bilbie Fecit 1750).

Why did Charles II give the bells to the Church? History and received knowledge tell us that Charles was visiting Sir Charles Harbord in the town, when he heard a peal of cracked bells. Harbord was the Controller of the Duchy of Cornwall purse at that time and he lived at Welton Manor, which lies to the north-east of the town's High Street.. As a favour to the Harbord family and possibly as a reward for some act of loyalty on the part of the people of Norton, or some service in the Royal cause during the Civil war, the King gave three bells to St. John's.

There is a second link between King Charles II and St. John's Church. The King had three Coats of Arms, one to commemorate his title as Prince of Wales, a second celebrating his Accession at the time of the Restoration of the monarchy and a third acknowledging his title as King of Scotland. It is the second one that has found its way to Midsomer Norton. The Coat of Arms originally hung from the West Gallery in St. John's, but at some time was removed and given to Downside Church. In 1983, when Downside Church was closed, the Coat of Arms was returned to St. John's.

At this time, and to the present time, the Coat of Arms is in need of renovation and restoration, before it can be rehung. The intention is to do this work and to have it rehung above the South door.



King Charles II Coat of Arms

The text of the motto surrounding the crest reads, 'Honi soit qui mal y pense' (Evil to him who evil thinks) This was the symbol of the Order of the Garter.

The text below is the Sovereign's motto, 'Dieu et mon droit' (God and my right).

The crest represents England, Scotland and Ireland with the three lions of England appearing in the first and third quadrant, the lion of Scotland in the second and the harp of Ireland in the fourth.

The rose of England, the thistle of Scotland and the shamrock of Ireland appear above the Sovereign's motto.

The English lion is to the left and the Scottish unicorn to the right.