The end of the Hydes of Hyde End

In the 16th century, laws were introduced compelling everybody to attend Anglican church services. Those who refused to comply were known as “recusants”, a word that comes from the Latin verb “recusare”, meaning “to refuse”. The vast majority of recusants were Roman Catholics. Although they were a small minority, at any one time there were hundreds of them in Berkshire.

Hyde is a common surname among Berkshire recusants. Recusant Hydes are found concentrated in certain places for long periods and apparently randomly elsewhere. One could be excused for thinking that a high proportion of the Hydes of Berkshire were recusants. Indeed, Mrs Bryan Stapleton makes that assumption in her well-known book on the Catholic missions of Oxfordshire, published in 1906.

This article suggests that, in reality, there were only two persistently recusant Hyde families in Berkshire and that they were not closely related. One of these families occupied the same location throughout the penal times. The male line having failed, it was then replaced by the other family, which had already moved its main seat once before. Meanwhile, during the very period when anti-Catholic legislation was being gradually repealed, the incoming family conformed to Anglicanism.

(In this article, ‘Berkshire’ refers to the historic county, including those parts incorporated into Oxfordshire since 1974.)

The surname Hyde
A hide, sometimes spelled hyde, was a vaguely defined Saxon measurement representing the amount of land needed to support a household. Counties were divided into hundreds, each supposedly containing a hundred hides. It is not surprising therefore that the surname Hyde is relatively common.

People with the surname Hyde were found in various strata of society. Most recusant Catholic Hydes were members of gentry families. The policy for the survival of Catholicism in the homes of sympathetic gentry was formalised in 1586 at a conference held at Harleyford, Buckinghamshire, just across the Thames from the east Berkshire village of Hurley. The Heralds’ Visitations of Berkshire contain many pedigrees of various branches of the Hydes. Although the Hydes were, for the most part, relatively lowly ranked gentry, at least two were knighted.

The Hydes of Denchworth
The most prolific Berkshire gentry family with the surname Hyde takes its name from a place called The Hyde in the southern part of Denchworth, a parish about three miles NNW of the market town of Wantage in north Berkshire (now Oxon). According to legend, the manor was given to the family by the Danish king Canute, before the Norman Conquest. The family of the eminent 19th century
Anglo-Catholic churchman Dr Edward Bouverie Pusey, at the nearby village of Pusey, had a similar tradition involving Canute.

There is certainly documentary evidence of the Hyde family being at Denchworth as far back as the reign of William the Conqueror’s son, Henry I, particularly in the form of the Denchworth Breviary, sometimes called the Denchworth Missal. This is a notable choir breviary of the Sarum rite of the Catholic Mass and was given to the parish church of Denchworth by John Hyde, circa 1447. It contains obits of the Hyde family from 1156-1557 and is now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.¹

**The Hydes of Cheshire and southern Wiltshire**
The Hydes of Denchworth should not be confused with the Hydes of Cheshire, later of southern Wiltshire, who became Earls of Clarendon. There were branches of this family also in Berkshire, the second Earl of Clarendon living at Swallowfield Park, a few miles south of Reading, where he built the present mansion just after the ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688.

**The Hydes of Denchworth and their junior branches**
After the Reformation, most descendants of the Hydes of Denchworth, including the majority of their junior branches (who were scattered across Berkshire and as far away as Ireland) conformed to Anglicanism. This was despite Denchworth being only 2 miles from Lyford Grange, where the Jesuit martyr Edmund Campion was arrested in 1581 – an event which reinforced the recusancy of a number of local families.

In earlier times, John Yate of Lyford, Merchant of the Staple at Calais, married Alice Hyde of Denchworth, but after the Reformation there seems to have been no intermarriage between the main line of the Hydes and their strongly recusant Yate neighbours at Lyford and Buckland. However, a Humphrey Hyde of Buckland was ordained a Catholic priest at the English College at Douai in Flanders (now in the department of Nord, France). Also, in the Elizabethan regime’s first recusant roll, John Hyde of Shinfield, near Reading, was cited as a recusant.

**The Hydes of Pangbourne and Purley**
One junior branch of the Denchworth Hydes was tenaciously recusant. Francis Hyde, fourth son of the fifth grandson of William Hyde of Denchworth, headed this branch, which was known to the Heralds as “Hyde of Pangbourne”. Francis’s first wife was a member of the Tempest family of County Durham, which had been involved in the pro-Catholic Rising of the North of 1569. This may have been a factor in his determinedly recusant outlook.

Francis Hyde inherited from his mother the manor of La Hyde at Purley-on-Thames, near Pangbourne, which had belonged to a Hyde ancestor. At La Hyde, in 1609, Francis built Hyde Hall. The boundaries of three parishes – Purley, Sulham and a former detached part of the Oxfordshire parish of Whitchurch – converged within the house. Hyde Hall was set back from the Reading to Oxford road, now the A329, which follows the south bank of the Thames. The house was
less than two miles from the Thameside residence of the recusant Blount family, Mapledurham House, which lies across the river on the Oxfordshire bank.

Francis Hyde was the father of a nun, the grandfather of five more and the great-grandfather of another. (Convents in England had been closed by Henry VIII but English convents continued in France, Belgium and elsewhere in Catholic Europe.) He was possibly also an ancestor of Fr Charles Hyde, who studied at the English College in Rome, 1701-08.

This recusant junior branch of the Denchworth Hydes held Hyde Hall, Purley, for 111 years. The last head of the Purley-based family, a member of its fifth generation, was another Francis, the fourth to bear that name. He was educated at the Jesuit school at St Omer in the Pas-de-Calais, France and lived some of the time at St James, Westminster.

The Baulking (Faringdon) estates
Francis Hyde IV married Elizabeth Widdowes in 1715 and settled on her “in bar of dower” estates at Baulking, which was then in the parish of Uffington, near Faringdon. In 1720, Francis sold Hyde Hall, which was subsequently renamed Purley Hall. He died without issue and was succeeded by John Hyde, his brother and executor, who inherited the Baulking estates as tenant for life. John had a son and four daughters, one of whom married an Italian merchant.

The Hydes of Marlborough
By 1740, John Hyde was living at Marlborough in Wiltshire. The Hydes resided at the Hermitage in Hyde Lane, which was a Catholic mission until about 1794. For most of this period, it was still illegal to operate a Catholic chapel. Nonetheless, the Hydes had a resident Benedictine chaplain.

For much of the mission’s existence, the chaplain was Dom William Gregory Cowley. He later became president-general of the Benedictines in England. Seven people were confirmed at the chapel in 1753. The Catholic community at Marlborough comprised about 15 Catholics.

The Mission at Whatcombe
John Hyde of Marlborough died in 1750, aged 55, and was succeeded by his son, another John. In 1788, John Hyde II inherited the manor of Whatcombe from Elizabeth Young, who was a relative and the last of a long line of recusants that had included two Franciscan priests. Whatcombe lies in the Berkshire parish of Fawley, 14 miles ENE of Marlborough and about 6 miles south of Wantage, on the road to Hungerford (now the A338). It was once a parish in its own right.

In 1765, Sir John Moore sold Fawley Manor, which had hitherto housed a Catholic mission. To save the district from losing its Catholic presence, the Youngs of nearby Whatcombe House provided accommodation for a missionary priest funded by the Franciscans. After Elizabeth Young died, John Hyde II allowed the Franciscan mission to continue.

The Catholic community of Whatcombe comprised about a dozen people, including the Hyde’s principal tenants, a branch of the Dearlove family. John’s
heir, Charles Hyde, sold the estate in 1820, at which point the Catholic mission closed.

The Hydes of Hyde End, Brimpton
Thus far we have concentrated on the consistently recusant Pangbourne, Purley and Marlborough branch of the widely spread and numerous Hydes of Denchworth. We have also mentioned in passing the Hydes of Cheshire and Wiltshire origin, who included the Lords Clarendon. But there was also a third Hyde dynasty in Berkshire, the Hydes of Hyde End, Brimpton.

Like the Hydes of Pangbourne, Purley and Marlborough, this was another strongly recusant family. However, the Heralds’ Visitations, while tracing the main line of the family back to the 15th century, show no evidence of links to the Hydes of Denchworth nor to the Clarendon Hydes. (This has not stopped wishful thinking, the fostering of family myths and the unilateral adoption of the name Clarendon by various Hydes from time to time over the years.)

When Bishop Challoner visited the area in 1741, he noted that one missioner priest served the 300 Catholics of Hyde End, Newbury and Great and Little Shefford.

Brimpton – the parish and its recusants
Hyde End, Brimpton should not be confused with Hyde End, Shinfield, which is 11 miles further east, a few miles south of Reading. Brimpton is about 5 miles ESE of Newbury and lies between the River Kennet and its tributary Enborne, which forms part of the boundary between Hampshire and Berkshire. The road from London to Bath (now the A4), which links Reading, Newbury, Hungerford and Marlborough, runs about a mile to the north of the village centre.

The Kennet valley around Brimpton was an area with a number of strongly recusant families. The Perkins family of Ufton Court, 5 miles ENE of Brimpton, maintained a strong recusant base at their home for two centuries, until they died out in 1769. Ownership of Ufton Court then passed to the absentee Jones family of Llanarth, who maintained a Franciscan chaplaincy there until 1803.

William Perkins, father of the first Perkins of Ufton Court, was gentleman usher to Cardinal Pole and lived at Brimpton as tenant-at-will of Sir Francis Englefield, Mary Tudor’s most militant supporter. The Perkins family were also related to the Elizabethan martyr Cuthbert Mayne.

The Wollascotts, and their successors through marriage, the Fingalls – both Catholic families – lived in the vicinity throughout most of the recusancy period. Their main base was a couple of miles away at Woolhampton but they also owned the two main manors of Brimpton between 1595 and 1786. The Lords Fingall, whose family name was Plunkett, were related to the martyred Archbishop Oliver Plunkett of Armagh.
The Hydes of Hyde End will have known their fellow recusants – the Wollascotts, Fingalls and Perkins – very well. Also, via the Wollascotts, the Hydes were associates of the recusant Throckmorton family of Coughton, Warwickshire.

Martin Wollascott married Mary Throckmorton, daughter of Sir Francis Throckmorton, the second baronet. Mary died in 1709: she and her husband were buried in St Peter’s parish church, Brimpton. They were commemorated by a wall plaque in the church, as were two infant daughters of the seventh Earl of Fingall. Dame Anne Throckmorton, mother of Mary Wollascott, mentions the Hyde End Hydes in her will, proved in 1728.

When in 1779 Lord Fingall retired from Woolhampton to Ireland, the Catholic mission at Woolhampton Place continued. Its chaplain served Hyde End and the Catholics of the nearby town of Newbury.

The estates of the Hydes of Hyde End

Hyde End was an estate in the south-west of Brimpton parish but was not consistently regarded as a manor. In 1754, the last of the original Hydes of Hyde End died. He was another Francis Hyde and his will provides interesting insights into what happened next.

When reading wills of this period, we should bear in mind the strictures imposed on Catholics regarding land tenure. Not until the first Catholic Relief Act of 1778 could Catholics own, purchase or inherit land legally. Thus they resorted to the use of Protestant intermediaries and cleverly contrived trusts to enable them to inherit, bequeath and otherwise acquire or transfer landed interests. The complexity of Francis Hyde’s will, composed in 1753, reflects this situation. It also avoids specifically Catholic references.

Francis Hyde owned property on both sides of the Berkshire-Hampshire border. Apart from his modest mansion at Hyde End (with a nearby cottage known as The Priest House and a tiny outbuilding, said to be a chapel), he owned about 200 acres of meadow, woodland and coppice, several corn mills, an orchard and farms at Baughurst and Tadley. Francis left no children or widow. He had an unmarried sister, Katherine, to whom he left a lifetime legacy and whom he charged with distributing money or bread to the poor of Brimpton parish. He also required her to distribute cash to the poor labourers of Kingsclere, Hampshire, who had regularly worked for him.

The Switzers of Bucklebury

Francis Hyde had a cousin, Mary, who was the wife of Richard Switzer, the son of a schoolmaster from nearby Bucklebury. Mary and Richard Switzer had four sons, who were all in their minority at the time of Francis Hyde’s death. Francis Hyde left the estate to each of these four Switzer sons and their male heirs in succession, according to seniority. So the oldest son would inherit first. He would be succeeded by his oldest surviving male heir, or, if he had no male heir, by his oldest surviving brother, who would be succeeded by his oldest male heir, and so on.
Francis Hyde left a lifetime legacy for his cousin Mary and made provision for the welfare and education of her Switzer sons. Francis also imposed the condition that, on inheriting the estate, each Switzer should adopt the surname Hyde, whereupon he could use the family coat of arms.

Thus, the oldest Switzer boy, Richard, became Richard Hyde of Hyde End. He died in 1779, leaving no wife or child. Like earlier ‘true’ Hyde End Hydes, he was buried in the Anglican church of St Peter, Brimpton. His will mentions the Catholic chaplain at Woolhampton:

"I give and bequeath unto the gentleman who shall officiate as priest at Woolhampton Place one guinea yearly for seven years to say prayers on the Anniversary of my decease”.

Richard must have been the unmarried male head of the household who was noted as an apostate (in Anglican eyes) in the Brimpton entry of the 1767 Returns of Papists. This shows 29 Catholics in Brimpton, including Richard’s mother and one of his brothers.

Richard was succeeded by his brother Charles, who already had the second Christian name Hyde. He thus became Charles Hyde Hyde of Hyde End. (One can only hope that he did not stutter when giving his full name and title.) Charles died childless in 1803 and, like his brother, was buried in St Peter’s, Brimpton. His will mentions the Catholic chaplains at Woolhampton and Ufton Court:

"I give to the Reverend Mr Ansteed [Anstead] of Woolhampton and to the Reverend Mr Baynham of Ufton the sum of twenty shillings apiece to say prayers twice each at their respective Chappels and once at Hyde End for my repose”.

**Hyde End passes to the Hydes of Marlborough**

The other two Switzer brothers had no male heirs and predeceased Charles. So there were no more Switzers entitled to inherit the estate. Therefore another clause in Francis Hyde’s 1753 will came into play. This gave the estate “to my cousin John Hyde (son of my cousin John Hyde late of Marlborough in the County of Wilts Esquire deceased) his heirs and assigns for ever”.

The term cousin was used very loosely and it would be interesting to know whether there was any relationship other than some vague assumption that ultimately all Hydes were related. The suspicion must be that, in 1753, Francis Hyde wanted the name Hyde to endure at Hyde End and that he preferred it to be in the hands of the Hydes of Pangbourne, Purley and Marlborough line, because they were the only consistently Catholic branch of the Hydes of Denchworth. But it is obvious that this was merely the fall-back position: Francis Hyde’s first preference was to hand the legacy to the relatively humble Switzers, provided they took the name Hyde. This suggests that the family link with the Hydes of Denchworth was tenuous at best.

So, in 1803 Hyde End became the main country residence of John Hyde II, late of Marlborough. The house was given a thorough Georgian makeover in 1807 by a builder from Newbury. John was also tenant for life of his estates at Baulking, in Uffington parish. In 1777, he had married Charlotte Jelf, daughter of a captain in
the Royal Navy, at St George’s church, Hanover Square, London. At this time, Catholics (and everyone else except Quakers and Jews) were required to marry in the Church of England. It was also commonplace for Catholic gentry to be buried according to Anglican rites (following a secret Catholic requiem Mass) and commemorated in their local parish church, sometimes in a family aisle. But from this time onwards, John Hyde II seems to drift ever closer to Anglicanism.

**The start of the drift towards Anglicanism**

John Hyde II and his wife had five sons and at least five daughters. On 1st January 1784, at the parish church of St Peter and Paul, Marlborough, the Hydes had six of their children baptised according to the Anglican rite. Their ages ranged from a few months to six years, so it can be assumed that they had already been baptised soon after birth by John Hyde’s Benedictine chaplain. All the Hyde children born thereafter were baptised in the Anglican church at Marlborough. The Anglican parish register noted that the Hydes were “registered as papists”.

John Hyde II was probably smoothing the way for his sons to get good jobs in the British military or with the East India Company, which controlled the Indian army. These jobs would not have been open to Catholics. The strategy seems to have worked, as his first and third sons both served in the Indian army and died unmarried in India. (A transcript of the eldest son’s Anglican baptism survives in the India Office records.) The second son was a civil servant in the East India Company’s civil service in the Presidency of Madras. The fourth and fifth sons were twins: one was a lieutenant in the King’s Own 4th Regiment of Foot, a regiment with a distinctly anti-Catholic tradition.

**Rewriting of the history of the Hyde End Hydes**

John Hyde II, formerly of Marlborough and later of Hyde End, died in 1819. He was buried alongside his wife at Uffington parish church, near his Baulking estate. His will contained not a hint of Catholicism.

His second son, Charles, the former civil servant in India, succeeded him and promptly disposed of Whatcombe and its Catholic mission. *Burke’s Landed Gentry* subsequently gave the pedigree of the Hydes of Hyde End as that of the Pangbourne, Purley and Marlborough Hydes, but with no mention of their recusancy, no reference to the original Hydes of Hyde End and not a hint of the Francis Hyde’s preferred successors, the humble Switzers. The new Hydes of Hyde End seem to have glided effortlessly into the bosom of the Protestant Establishment.

**The mysterious Arabella Hyde of Marlborough**

According to the 1851 census, Arabella Hyde was born at Marlborough in 1793, at a time when there was still (just) a Catholic mission there. She made her profession as a nun on 7th June 1827 and was known as Sister Mary Catherine. She died on 10th June 1852, at the age of 60. The order to which she belonged was the Augustinian Canonesses of St Monica’s, Louvain. During Arabella Hyde’s time as a nun, the sisters were based at St Monica’s Priory, Spettisbury, Dorset 1800-61.
No birth or baptismal record has been found for Arabella, though it seems probable that she was related in some way to the Hydes of Marlborough.

**Hyde End in the mid 19th century**

In the mid 19th century, one of John Hyde's grandsons, John Francis Hyde, became the squire of Hyde End. When he married, in 1849, it was legal to do so in a Catholic church but instead he married in the Anglican church of St Mary's, Marylebone. One suspects that he had never had any real contact with Catholicism.

In 1862, he was involved in a dispute about access to a road at Hyde End and the following year he advertised the house to let. There were various well-to-do tenants over the years. The Hyde family meanwhile used Hyde End as a country retreat.

In 1870, the *Reading Mercury* carried a long report from the battlefields of the Franco-Prussian war from the young war artist Frank Hyde, described as “of Hyde End and Wandsworth”. Frank, an exceptionally tall man even by modern standards, was a great-grandson of John Hyde II and lived until 1937. He became a celebrated artist, exhibiting at the Royal Academy, running a studio on Capri and befriending the American painter John Singer Sargent. The 1871 census notes Frank’s 18-year-old brother, Clarence Charles Hyde, as resident at Hyde End.

Bearing in mind that the Tichbornes and Doughtys were Catholic families, it is interesting that, in the winter of 1870-71, Teresa Mary Josephine Doughty Tichborne wrote two letters from Hyde End House to her mother. These were quoted in reportage of the famous Tichborne claimant case. Was Tissie Tichborne a guest of Clarence Charles Hyde, a tenant or a guest of a tenant?

**The Hydes sell Hyde End**

In June 1917, the *Reading Mercury* advertised the Hyde estates at Hyde End, Brimpton and Baulking for sale. They comprised 750 acres and included Hyde End House, five freehold farms, various cottages and smallholdings, a fishery and “choice residential sites”. With the estates sold, that particular branch of the Hydes severed its main connection with Berkshire, a century after it abandoned the religion it had nurtured for so many difficult years.

**Tony Hadland**

*Most recently revised 28 February 2016*

**Acknowledgements**

The author acknowledges with thanks the research of Tony Harrison into the connection between the Switzers and the Hydes. Thanks go also to Abbot Geoffrey Scott of Douai Abbey and David Hyde for their assistance.
Principal sources consulted
Berkshire parish registers. (via Find My Past).
Census records (via Find My Past).
British Newspaper Archive (via Find My Past).
Hyde family tree on the website Who were the nuns? (Retrieved 2015 from http://wwtn.history.qmul.ac.uk/ftrees/Hyde.pdf)
Hugh Bowler, Recusant Rolls No.3 & No.4, 1594-6 (London, 1965).
Geoffrey Holt, St Omers and Bruges Colleges, 1593-1773 (London, 1979)
James Cosin, The Names of the Roman Catholics, Nonjurors and others, etc. (London, 1745).
Frederick Arthur Crisp, Catholic Register of Ufton Court, Berkshire, and Woolhampton (London, 1889).
Geoffrey Scott, St Mary’s Church, Woolhampton (Woolhampton, 1975).
A. Mary Sharp, The History of Ufton Court (London, 1892).
History and Antiquities of Newbury and its Environs (Speenhamland, 1839).
Tony Harrison, Updated information on Hyde/Switzer (Memorandum sent to author, 2014).
Tony Harrison, The wills of Francis Hyde (proved 1755), Richard Hyde (formerly Switzer, proved 1779), Charles Hyde Hyde (formerly Switzer, proved 1803) and John Hyde (proved 1821) (Transcribed 2014)
Clariores e Tenebris, “Berkshire Residences”, Reading Mercury (Reading, 30 Nov 1889).

Bryan Stapleton (Mrs), A History of the Post-Reformation Catholic Missions in Oxfordshire (London, 1906).


Tony Hadland, Thames Valley Papists (Mapledurham, 2004).

__________________________

1 Shelfmark: MS. Lat. liturg. b. 14