



The signatories: Sheffield

From the flamboyance and bold energy of the court of Elizabeth through the mercantile and colonizing ventures of James I to the conflicted reign of (eventually decapitated) Charles I - the life of Edmund, 3rd Baron Sheffield and 1st Earl of Mulgrave, spanned three reigns.

Edmund was born on December 7th, 1565, only 7 years after Elizabeth ascended to the throne, to a mother whose personal history became entangled with some of the most notorious names of the Elizabethan era.

Edmund's parents, John (2nd Baron Sheffield) and Douglas Howard (daughter of Elizabeth I's cousin and chamberlain William Howard, 1st Baron Howard of Effingham) were married in 1562. John was 24; Douglas' age is far less certain – she was perhaps as young as 14. Before John's untimely death in 1568, two children were born to the couple: Elizabeth, later Countess of Ormonde as wife of the 10th Earl, Thomas Butler; and Edmund.

Douglas Sheffield was left a very beautiful, very well connected and very unsupervised young widow. In 1573, she caught the practiced and appreciative eye of Elizabeth's favorite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Douglas later claimed a secret wedding had been performed but, when she gave birth to a son in August of 1574, Dudley declared that no marriage had occurred.

Dudley then became adulterously entangled with Lettice Knollys Devereaux, Countess of Essex and mother of five (including Elizabeth's late-in-life favorite Robert Devereaux). After Lettice's husband died, another secret wedding was held – this time between Dudley and Lettice. Lettice did not, however, suffer Douglas' fate. A far stronger personality, she had the power and family connections to force Dudley to regularize her position (to Elizabeth's great displeasure). Douglas Howard was intimidated into publicly renouncing her previous claims of marriage to Dudley and she eventually married Edmund Stafford.

Our Edmund, having become Lord Sheffield in 1568 at age 3 (and hereafter referred to as "Sheffield"), was educated at Christ Church, Oxford and, being a fashionable young teenaged courtier, sponsored a troupe of actors, Lord Sheffield's Men, in the late 1570s and 1580s. At the age of 15-going-on-16, Sheffield married. His wife, Ursula Tyrwhitt, was also from Lincolnshire.

Ursula was one of 22 children born to Sir Robert and Lady Tyrwhitt, which may explain why her date of birth is uncertain. Sir Robert was related to Catherine Parr, Henry VIII's last queen. Soon after Henry's death, Catherine married Thomas Seymour; the young Elizabeth Tudor lived with her stepmother and her new husband. Sir Robert and his lady were witnesses to a flirtation between Tom Seymour and Elizabeth and reported it, in alarm, to the Privy Council. The Tyrwhitts were then made Elizabeth's guardians. They questioned her, gave unwelcome advice, and attempted (unsuccessfully) to trick Elizabeth into an admission of inappropriate conduct. Elizabeth never forgave them. Sheffield's marriage to one of the detested Tyrwhitts did not endear him to the queen.

Ursula was also a Roman Catholic and the marriage was celebrated according to the Catholic rite in November in 1581. To be a Catholic in England was to commit treason. (Roman Catholics did not accept Henry III as head of the Church of England, disavowed his marriage to Anne Boleyn and, therefore, did not necessarily accept Elizabeth I's right to the English throne.) Perhaps in an effort to counterbalance a marriage that might be seen as traitorous, Sheffield became a fierce anti-Catholic and an equally fierce warrior for England.

Sheffield captained three ships: the *Victory*, the *Dreadnaught* and the *White Bear*, in the English battles against the Spanish Armada in 1588. He served under the command of his maternal uncle, Charles Howard of Effingham, Lord High Admiral of England, who knighted him on the spot for his bravery.

Sheffield's promotion at court, however, continued to be slow than average, undoubtedly because of his politically-incorrect marriage. His service against the Armada was, however, eventually recognized when he was invested as a Knight of the Garter. The Order of the Garter, founded by King Edward III in 1348 as a reward for loyalty and military merit, is the oldest British order of chivalry. The order consists of the King or Queen and 25 knights. Each knight displays a banner of his arms in St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle, along with a stallplate. Banners are taken down as knights die, but the stallplates, including Sheffield's, remain as memorials.

In 1591, Sheffield was granted the manor of Mulgrave in Yorkshire (part of the forfeited estate of the Catholic Sir Francis Bigod) and began to become associated with the Council of the North, an administrative body originally set up by Richard III to improve government control over the northern counties. The Council was reorganized by Henry VIII and headquartered in York, gradually acquiring even more power during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. Sheffield requested appointment to the presidency of the Council of the North. As with most official positions in the 16th and 17th centuries, the potential for financial reward was large. Elizabeth denied him the presidency but, on James I's accession to the English throne in 1603, Sheffield's request was finally granted.

Sheffield, however, wanted more! As the father of 6 sons needing to be launched into the fashionable world of the court and 9 daughters needing dowries, with estates to maintain in Lincolnshire and York, and with the upkeep of the fine (and very expensive) Butterwick House in the Hammersmith area of London, his expenses were high. He complained bitterly to James I that the king had "repaired the ruins of every nobleman's estate in English except his" and rejected a proffered annual pension of £1000 as too low. Eventually, James granted him an interest in Yorkshire alum mines, which gave him a larger pension, although it was never reliable and never nearly enough!

As president of the Council of the North, Sheffield was largely known for his continuing persecution of Roman Catholics. He ran afoul of King James I in this, however, when in 1618 he summarily executed a Catholic priest. James I, who had been hatching plans for possible marriage alliances with the two great Catholic countries of Spain and France for his children, was greatly displeased. Fearing dismissal, Sheffield sold his office to Lord Scrope in 1619. Sheffield also attempted to augment his income by investing in colonizing companies. He was an early member of the Virginia Company, as well as investing in the New England Company. Both efforts were successful in establishing colonies – but neither made any money for their backers. (Apart from signing the Peirce Patent, Sheffield had direct dealings with the Pilgrims in 1624 when, at the behest of Edward Winslow and Robert Cushman, he granted the Pilgrims a patent allowing them to establish a fishing stage at Cape Ann.)

Sheffield's financial situation had not prospered; neither had his domestic situation. All six of his sons with Ursula had died by 1618 (although one had married and left a son of his own). Three of the sons had drowned together in 1614, while crossing the River Humber.

When Ursula herself died, Sheffield set out to find a rich wife. When he was unsuccessful in his search for marital money, he settled instead for youth - at the time of Sheffield's marriage in 1619 to Mariana Irwin, she

was 16 and he was 64. Mariana added 5 more children to Sheffield's brood.

In 1626, James I was succeeded by his son Charles I. Sheffield was made the Earl of Mulgrave at Charles' coronation. As the English Civil War loomed, however, Sheffield did not remain loyal to the Crown. He was, instead, one of the few peers who supported Oliver Cromwell. Although he was, in 1640, too old to take an active part, he used all his influence to advance the parliamentary cause. The castle and lands of Mulgrave having been garrisoned by the King's forces, Sheffield was left once again short of funds. He petitioned Parliament for support and, in 1645, was granted a pension of £50 per week. Sheffield did not enjoy his pension long; he died at Butterwick House in London in October 1646, aged 81, and was succeeded by his grandson.