

An Audience with the Queen

Caroline Cannon-Brookes

Much of the diary of a young Bohemian aristocrat's travelling in England in the summer of 1600 reads just like that of a tourist of today, packed with descriptions of the sights seen though written in Latin. Now in the Vatican Library, it has been translated and fully annotated by G.W. Groos and published by Thames & Hudson, under the title *The Diary of Baron Waldstein*. The diary gives us a rare insight into Elizabethan England.

Born Zdeněk Brtnický z Valdštejna in 1581, his father died when he was young and he inherited the Budějovice Estates from his uncle, the Chief Justice of Moravia. As an undergraduate matriculating at Strasbourg University he started to keep a diary and from his 18th birthday travelled widely in Europe before returning home to Moravia in 1602.

Waldstein crossed the channel to Dover with two companions on 26th June 1600 and climbed up to the castle "which is the rule for people entering the country, and for which we each paid 4 denarii". They gave their names to the magistrates and the Mayor and were completely frustrated by being detained there for several days "not only throwing away our time but wasting our money as well". Released, they first visited Canterbury Cathedral which he described as particularly large and splendid, containing many marble tombs and also that of the Black Prince with his helmet and sword and other arms prominently displayed. Below was also a spacious undercroft where the services were held in French and attended by congregations of 2,000 people". From Gravesend they boarded a small boat to London and the following day rested spending time in lively conversation and "witnessed a group of thieves and robbers on their way to be hanged made a notable sight". At Westminster Abbey with a sharp eye he picked out the Chapel of Henry VII, "a work of staggering architectural skill and one of the wonders of the world which he had built with a vaulted roof chiselled in stone as a burial place for himself, his Queen and his descendants" He describes in detail the interior of Whitehall Palace and its contents, which is a valuable document as in 1698 it was completely destroyed by fire apart from Inigo Jones's detached Banqueting Hall. Undoubtedly the highlight of his visit was his audience with Queen Elizabeth I which he records as the greatest object of his journey. They took a small boat to the Royal



Count Zdeněk Brtnický z Valdštejna, left. Queen Elizabeth I in the 1595 portrait by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger

Residence of Placentia (Greenwich) where they were met by Monsieur Lesieur, who had been sent by the Queen's command following the orders of Sir Robert Cecil to whom they had been given letters of introduction by Lord Neville, the English Ambassador, at Boulogne. At 10 o'clock they were taken into the Presence Chamber. "Then, dressed in white and silver, the Maids of Honour (their beauty and shapeliness had no difficulty in diverting the eyes and minds of some of the spectators) made ready for the entrance of the Queen and those who were to escort her to the chapel. A procession came first, led by the Chancellor carrying a gold-embroidered purse bearing the royal insignia, and a Knight of the Garter holding a sword before him, and Secretary Cecil following: then herself, glittering with the glory of majesty and adorned with jewellery and precious gems, entered into view of the whole assembly and stretched her arms out wide as if to embrace everybody present. At her entry everyone knelt."

The Queen had been advised of his arrival and welcomed him in English. He then made a rather long speech of greeting in Latin and she stretched out her hand for him to kiss and immediately raised him to his feet. He recorded his speech of farewell stating his humility and praying that he might be added to the role of Her Majesty's dutiful servants and praying to Almighty God for her long life and also for the Church and the People of England to be long preserved in prosperity and happiness. When he had finished she replied that she understood that he had asked for letters which she then granted promising that all the doors of her kingdom should be open to him with letters of introduction to be written to the Governors of the most important Castles and Royal Palaces and to

the Vice-Chancellors of the two universities. Baron Waldstein set out on his journey visiting many places which he recounts in his diary including both Cambridge and Oxford universities, where he was feted and well received, and describes them in great detail. Before his departure he explored the City of London and completed his visit to England at Rochester to see the Queen's ships, going on board the two largest - the *Elisabeth Jonas* and the *Triumph*. He was very impressed with the *Elisabeth Jonas* which in 1588 had been attacked by 14 guns of the Spanish Fleet but came off undamaged. In Dover they were offered a passage on a ship sailing to Boulogne after having to pay 22 shillings each for a permit to leave the country.

In 1619 Baron Waldstein was appointed Chamberlain to the King of Bohemia, Frederick V Elector Palatine, married to Elizabeth Stuart the *Winter Queen*. Following the Battle of the White Mountain he was captured and imprisoned in the Špilberk Castle in Brno where he died three years later. His property was confiscated and his books were acquired by Cardinal Archbishop Franz von Nicolsburg. When the Swedes invaded Moravia in 1645 and the Cardinal's library was seized, it was sent to join the Royal Swedish Library in Stockholm. On Queen Christina's abdication the *Diary* was amongst the many books in her library that followed her to Rome in 1657 and which were acquired by Pope Alexander VIII after her death, since when it has remained in the Vatican Library.

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