

CHAPTER IV

A TOWNE OF HIS CALLED IRETON

Richard Sanders of Charlwood, whose initials and arms appear on the beautiful rood screen at Charlwood Church, had four sons. Nicholas, his eldest son and heir to the family land at Charlwood, married Alice Hungate and inherited his father's large estates spread throughout the neighbourhood: his family is portrayed in the memorial brass in the Church.

Not so well established in life were the younger sons, one of whom, Thomas (the first to bear the illustrious name of Thomas Sanders), knew well he would remain playing second fiddle if he stayed in Charlwood. So he went into the army, and as a young man was fortunate in making an acquaintance with his Commander, Colonel Gresley. He quickly rose in rank, and during the course of his army career went into "ye warres in Flanders" with Colonel Gresley who came from Drakelow, in Derbyshire; during this campaign he came to know his superior very well, for, on his return from the Low Countries in about 1620, it is recorded that he "went into Darbieshire" and settled on the estate of the Gresleys at Lullington.

This lucky connection draw him away from the old Sanders' lands at Charlwood, starting a new Sanders strain in Derbyshire, where the family remained for several centuries. Thomas married the right person, a landowner's heir, and we find his son, another Thomas, as Lord of the Manor at Lullington, and the family estates spreading. This Thomas's son and heir, Collingwood, was father of the Roundhead, Colonel Sir Thomas Sanders. In two generations after befriending the impecunious soldier returning from Flanders, the

Gresleys must have regretted their beneficence: Collingwood Sanders bought out much of the Gresley land as well as parts of the neighbouring Holland's estate.

Collingwood married well. His wife was one of the substantial Derbyshire family of Sleigh, and heir to her father. He knew how he intended his family to live, and, apart from being father to the enigmatic Sir Thomas, Collingwood himself deserves mention. He was educated at Balliol College, Oxford, where his tutor later became the Bishop of Salisbury, and after Oxford he became a Counsellor at Law and was at the Inner Temple at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It is uncertain how long or how keenly he pursued his law, but after his marriage it is likely he had very little need of it. Collingwood had ambitious plans for the Sanders family and in 1615 a grant was made to him by the College of Arms of the arms of the Surrey Sanders family with augmentations authorised by Norroy King-at-Arms. Having thus set his descendants on the map, Collingwood lived on as an established figure and member of the landed gentry in his native Derbyshire. He died at the age of 75 in 1653.

At the time of his father's death in 1653, Thomas Sanders was 43 and already had a substantial career in the Army behind him. At the time of the Civil War ten years earlier, his Puritan sympathies were very strong; he was one of the first to raise a force for the Parliamentary Cause in his part of the country. A contemporary but unfriendly account described Colonel Sanders as "a Derbyshire man who was a very godly, honest country gentleman, but had not many things requisite to a great souldier."

Whether this was the case or not, Thomas Sanders, as a major and later as

Colonel, made the best of bad times and obtained for himself an impressive commission from Cromwell to lead part of the Nottinghamshire Parliamentary forces. Descriptions of the events of the early part of the Civil Wars are blurred even if one takes them on the level of the whole country, but if one focuses one's attention on the events of a smaller locality they become still more confused by rivalry and back-biting. Serious disputes arose over the choice of officers, and rivalries between Parliamentary forces in different counties overbore even the animosity between the Cavalier and the Roundhead causes.

So there is a great deal of controversy surrounding Cromwell's appointment of Major Thomas Sanders as Colonel in command of the Nottinghamshire regiment. Friends of Sanders left Derbyshire to join this regiment, and the two commanders in Derbyshire, Sir John Gell and Colonel Gresley, deeply resented the appointment and the resulting weakening of their own forces. Unbiased reports on these events do not exist, and since all the Parliamentary ones were destroyed at the Restoration, the only contemporary accounts which survive are Royalists'. These are most uncomplimentary to the Colonel, but nevertheless the way in which his appointment as Commander is explained away in one account is sufficiently amusing to merit quoting in full:

"Meanwhile Cromwell, as soon as the Nottinghamshire men had imparted their desires to him, sent for Sanders and, cajoling him, told him none was so fit as himself to command the regiment; but the regiment thought not all of them so, but were designing to procure themselves another colonel, which he advised them to prevent, by sending speedily to the general

(Fairfax) to whom Cromwell also wrote to further the request, and before the messenger came back from Owthorpe procured the commission for Sanders ... But they had not only this check and disappointment by Cromwell, but all the Nottingham captains were passed over. The reasons that induced Cromwell to do this were two ... second he had besides a design, by insinuating himself with Colonel Sanders to flatter him into the sale of a towne of his called Ireton, which Cromwell earnestly desired to buy for Major-General Ireton who had married his daughter. And when at last he could not obtain it, in process of time, he took the Regiment away from him again."

Within the Parliamentary forces there thrived not only these local rivalries between the soldiery of different counties and between competing generals, but hatred and bitterness severed family and friend. On a personal as well as a political level it was a period of great bitterness and rancour. As, during the Civil War and the years following, the situation became more perplexing to the ordinary men, so violence and sudden death became more and more commonplace. In 1648, in theory at least, most of the fighting was over, but so bad were conditions that the ordinary men refused to accept the Act of Oblivion or to disband and return to their civilian livelihoods. The state of mind of these men is shown clearly in a letter written to the Parliamentary leaders at the time by the men of Colonel Sanders's regiment, which by chance has been preserved to the present day and is now in the British Museum. This "moderate and clear relation of the private souldierie of Colonel Scroops and Colonel Sanders regiments" claims that the soldiers who supported the anti-Royalist cause have not had their reward in seeing their opponents punished, nor has their own station in life improved by their own victory:

they went on to advocate the most blood-thirsty punishments.

Because of the disturbance of the times and the unfaithfulness of the reports of local events during the Civil War, not a great deal of detail about the achievements of campaigns of Thomas Sanders can be elicited until after the Restoration. The histories of the locality do, however give an insight into one or two events with which he was connected. Early in February 1644, Sir John Gell, who was at that time Colonel commanding the Derbyshire Parliamentary forces, dispatched Major Sanders to head off a detachment of Cavalier troops who were threatening the area round Derby itself. As the Major had the advantage of an excellent knowledge of the lie of the land and was known to many of the people in the neighbourhood, he succeeded without loss to himself in removing the threat, and decided to take the attack further than his orders required him to, ordering his men to pursue the enemy until they could be captured en masse. This was successfully done and the Cavalier contingent rounded up at Tissington Hall. When, the next day, the Hall was given up, Sanders had a simple task to incarcerate his prisoners in nearby Boylestone Church. This building presented an admirable stronghold, because only one of its doors could be used at the time. The prisoners were made to file through the small vestry door, as Sanders and his fellow officers stood outside it: it was too small to pass through without bowing the head - an unwitting piece of early prison psychology, perhaps. With his enemy safely locked up in the Church, Sanders continued with his men to Burton, which ultimately fell to the Roundheads. Later that year, Sanders was promoted Colonel, which reflected his superiors' approval of his success at Burton, and he remained in command of the garrison there until the end of that autumn.

In December he relinquished command of Burton and shortly afterwards went to strengthen the forces besieging Newark. This occupied his resources and indeed those of the entire Roundhead armed forces in the Midlands for many weeks.

In 1658, Oliver Cromwell's death was heralded by the announcement pinned to the doors of the Churches throughout the land, "Oliver Cromwell, the terror of England, is dead." The event was the signal for fresh outbursts of unrest. Derby was captured by Colonel White for the Royalists and its relief brought Colonel (now Sir) Thomas Sanders's name into the news once again. Mercurius Politicus for the week of August 24th to September 1st 1659 reports the events, "The matter of fact touching the late Insurrection in this county not being fully stated, be pleased to take this short review; Colonel White, flying from Nottingham, came (to Derby). His foolish Declaration in full Market caused an immediate uproare, some crying a King, others a free Parliament, some both. Mr. Siden, Minister of Langley, appeared before the Commissioners with his sword and pistol cockt, and spoke to Colonel Sanders to come down to the people quickly for blood would be spilt." Colonel Sanders and other leaders then withdrew from Derby to collect help in quashing the revolt. The report continues: "The next day being Saturday, Colonels Sanders, Michel and Barton made their retreat to Uttoxeter where my Lord Lambert took care to provide them with forces with whom on the Lords (day) they returned towards the Town of Derby at which place they met Captain Hope who brought along with him the Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire horse with eight companies of foot. The Town was then pale-faced; the Commissioners immediately met and proclaimed the leaders of the Insurrection Traitors." But the High Sherriff and the

Magistrates were also found guilty by their own proclamation - thus the revolt was put down.

1658 was late still to be supporting the Cromwellian cause. But Sir Thomas, now had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, and peace and quiet in the town, and it appears that he was a successful arbiter in these uprisings which were common in the last days of the Commonwealth: three weeks after this incident at Derby he was in Cheshire in a similar peace keeping role.

During the intervening years, Sir Thomas Sanders had been M.P. for Derbyshire and played an important part in local politics. One of the most interesting aspects of this enigmatic figure was his ability to back two horses at once, and both successfully. During the interregnum he was strongly committed to the Parliamentary cause, yet he never fell heavily from position and rank at the Restoration. Maybe this was due to his being not merely a soldier, but a politician as well. He was clever, and never overcommitted himself to one side. In 1656 he had signed a notable Remonstrance attacking Cromwell's arbitrary ruling. So he was not unequivocally Cromwellian (if he had been, he would perhaps have acceded to the Protector's request, to let him have his estate at Ireton for his son-in-law). Nor was he a double agent, however. Probably his own good sense and wish, in the last event, to maintain peace and order regulated his actions and allegiance more than excessive loyalty to one or another political faction. But more important than considerations of the character and political sense of Sir Thomas was his refusal at any cost to sign the Regicide. As an active participant on the Parliamentary side in the Civil War he was certainly expected by both his colleagues and his leaders to follow the policy which he had

actively supported to its ultimate conclusion. But the Colonel, for reasons of his own, would have none of it, and it is known that he took no part in the trial or verdict which resulted in the execution of King Charles I.

Even so, at the Restoration, he realised his danger, having been a parliamentary Colonel and M.P., and he swiftly settled his entire estates "for his fatherly love and natural affection for his son" on his eldest son Samuel. This was done in November 1660.

At the time of the restoration, however, Sir Thomas Sanders was included in the general indemnity and allowed to return to his home in Ireton and, as has been seen, he wasted no time in arranging his personal affairs. Even so the temptation to revert to the politics of force of the previous fifteen years was great, and in 1664 Colonel Sanders was implicated in an anti-Royalist rising in Derbyshire. Again he came away unscathed and was granted bail.

In 1683, the year of the Rye House Plot, he was put under recognisances of a £2,000 personal bond and two sureties of £1,000 each. The reason for this can be seen from a witness's deposition made on July 19, 1683, that he had seen at Thomas Sanders' home at Little Ireton "three or four blunderbushes (sic) some whereof were new ones." The papers relating to this incident clearly show that even twenty years after the Restoration Sir Thomas could not keep his hands out of politics and the agitations which went with it. Men more substantial than Sir Thomas lost their heads as a result of the Plot, but once again he managed to scrape out of the incident unscathed. Perhaps this was because he had sufficient assets to put up for bail, perhaps he had the right contacts in high

places.

He lived, a grand old man, until 1695. An interesting portrait of him in military dress survives to the present day - he looks a determined man and there is undoubtedly an element of intrigue and cunning in his eye. He is an enigmatic figure who rose to the knighthood at a time of unsettled order and uncertain peace by equally uncertain means. Little is known of him now and if more had been known about his anti-Royalist sympathies in his own day he would almost certainly have lost his head - either for his part in the rule of the Commonwealth interregnum or for supporting the Rye House Plot.

Many of the documents relating to his property are preserved at the Derby County library. They were discovered during the war at a solicitor's office in Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and show the exact extent of the Sanders lands at Caldwell, Lullington and Ireton. Of much greater interest is the character of the man, and published sources mention Sanders in various contexts, but these are mainly unfair and hostile to him like the quoted passage from Colonel Hutchinson's Memoirs about his obtaining his command. Some even more unequivocal condemnations of him appear in other sources. Granger's Biographical History of England, published in 1774, gives a resume of his life and activities as soldier and Politician, describing him as "a man of great influence in the county, of which he was Custos and Member of Parliament." Sir Thomas lived on to the grand old age of eighty five, and outlived his son, Samuel who died in 1688, by seven years. Samuel himself had another son also called Samuel who wrote the History of Derbyshire, but as he had no sons, the Derbyshire estates passed out of the family to his sister in the middle of the

eighteenth century. Other members of the Sanders, and later, Sandars family remained in the neighbourhood until the present century.