

NEW LIGHT ON SOME HARVEY PORTRAITS*

IN MEMORIAM SIR GEOFFREY KEYNES

by

J. M. LIPSCOMB**

SOME evidence has come to light which makes it possible to relate three familiar portraits of Dr William Harvey more closely to one another and to suggest a common point of origin from an important branch of the Harvey family. These are the Kent and Canterbury Hospital portrait, the King's Weston version, and the Surrendering portrait.

Anyone venturing into the field of Harvey portraiture must first pay homage to Sir Geoffrey Keynes, who gave us not only *The life of William Harvey* but also *The portraiture of William Harvey*,¹ the Thomas Vicary lecture delivered to the Royal College of Surgeons in 1948 and published as a book in the following year.

THE CANTERBURY PORTRAIT

My starting-point is the Kent and Canterbury Hospital portrait of Harvey (Plate I); cleaned in 1970, it was in 1974 formally consigned to the Kent Postgraduate Medical Centre at Canterbury, where it now hangs. Keynes gives it fairly high marks in his classification of Harvey portraits,² placing it in his second category of "other representations of great interest", below his primary examples, i.e. the portrait in the Royal College of Physicians of London, the portrait in the Hunterian Collection at Glasgow, and the bust in Hempstead Church. It is closely related but superior to the King's Weston version (Plate II), and is possibly its source. Keynes points to certain defects in comparison with the primary versions, the whole face somewhat elongated and no longer round as described by John Aubrey,³ with the wrinkles and creases of an old man, and sums up by saying: "I come therefore to the reluctant conclusion that the King's Weston and Canterbury portraits are posthumous productions, and so are not reliable witnesses to Harvey's features."⁴

The challenge comes in Keynes's statement that it was given to the Kent and

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¹ G. L. Keynes, *The portraiture of William Harvey*, (The Thomas Vicary Lecture to the Royal College of Surgeons), London, Royal College of Surgeons, 1949.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 14–16.

³ John Aubrey, *Brief lives*, edited by Oliver Lawson Dick, London, Penguin Books, 1972, p. 286ff.

⁴ Keynes, *op. cit.*, note 1 above, p. 16.

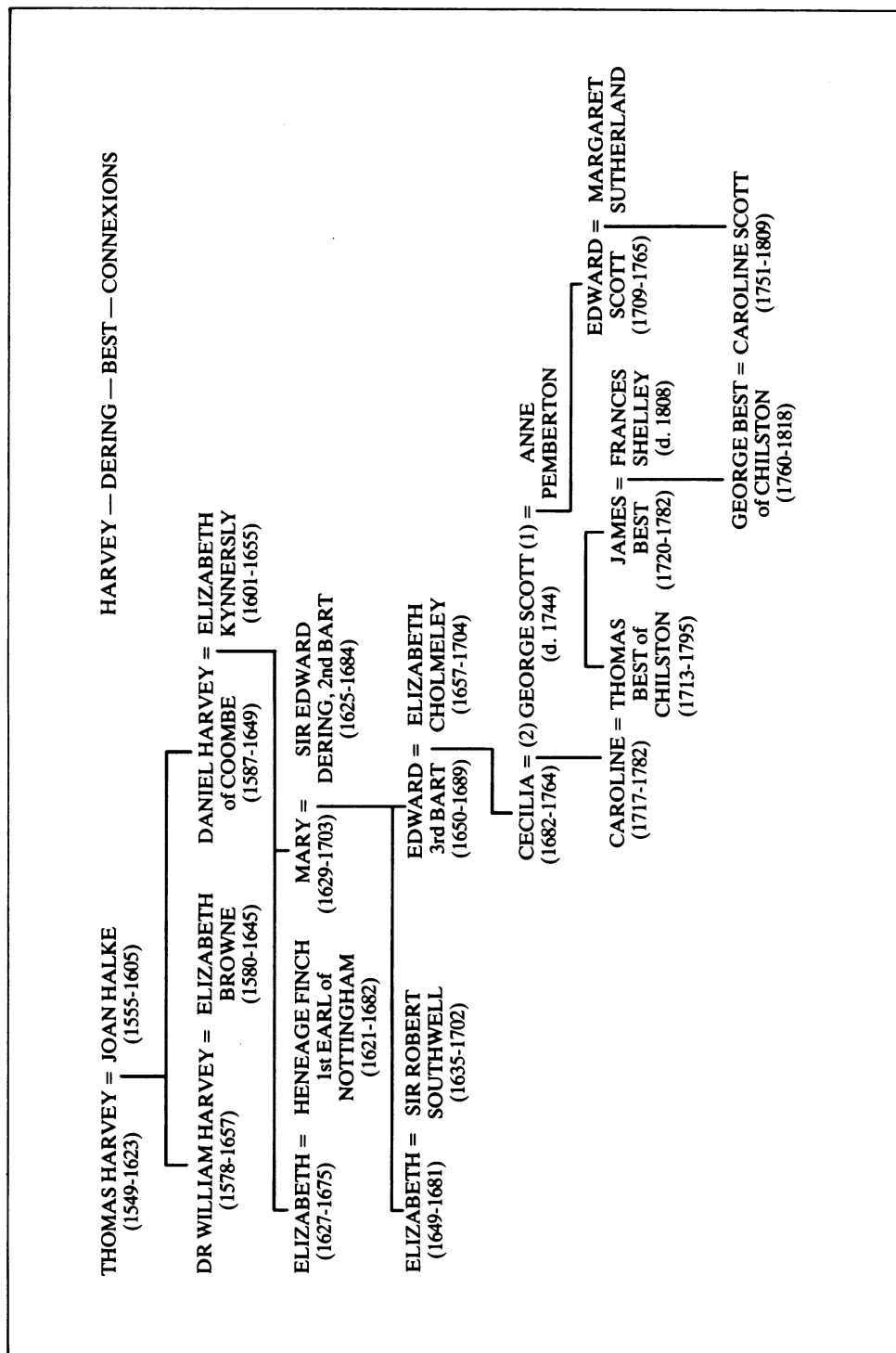
Canterbury Hospital in 1807 but has *otherwise no pedigree*. The wording of the superscription in the top right-hand corner of the portrait is: "Given to the Kent and Canterbury Hospital, by G. Best Esq^r. CHILSTON, 1807". The first questions, therefore, are, where is Chilston and who was G. Best?

Chilston Park is a fine sixteenth-century house at Lenham, near Maidstone, in Kent, which passed by sale out of the hands of the Best family in 1821. The Bests were wealthy Chatham brewers; Thomas (1713–1795), who bought and improved Chilston, married Caroline Scott (1717–1782) in 1743, and died without issue in 1795, leaving his estate to his nephew George (1760–1818), the donor of the Harvey portrait. George Best married another Caroline Scott (1751–1809), step-niece of the former Caroline; he dissipated his family wealth and his own health and died in 1818.

The Canterbury portrait belonged, therefore, to George Best of Chilston and it is fair to assume that he inherited it from his childless uncle, Thomas Best; there is, however, no specific mention of the painting in Thomas Best's will. An important clue to the origin of the painting is provided by the two Caroline Scotts whom Thomas and George married. The elder Caroline was descended from Cecilia Dering (1682–1764), who was the grand-daughter of Mary Harvey, Dr William Harvey's niece and wife of Sir Edward Dering (1625–1684), the second baronet. Cecilia, the daughter of the third baronet, married George Scott (d. 1744) as his second wife; their daughter, the elder Caroline Scott (1717–1782), who married Thomas Best, was therefore Mary Harvey's great-granddaughter. The younger Caroline Scott (1751–1809), Cecilia Dering's step-granddaughter, who married George Best, was thus Mary Harvey's step-great-great-granddaughter. Mary Harvey lived on at Surrenden-Dering as a widow from 1684 to 1703; she played an important part in the upbringing of her granddaughter Cecilia after the death of her father, Edward, when she was seven years old. In the year after Mary Harvey died, 1704, Cecilia was married. One may surmise, although there is no proof, that the Harvey portrait emanated from Surrenden-Dering in Kent, the home of the Derings, and came to Thomas Best as part of his marriage settlement, by way of his mother-in-law, Cecilia Dering, but this does nothing to establish when it was painted or by whom. Even if not painted from life, it seems to have been approved by the Dering family and accepted as a good likeness; perhaps Mary Harvey, Lady Dering, a dutiful niece, commissioned it; perhaps it was a copy of an accepted portrait of the doctor in his old age, which is no longer in existence; we do not know.

THE KING'S WESTON PORTRAIT

When we turn to the King's Weston portrait of Harvey (Plate II), the sister portrait of the Kent and Canterbury version, a direct route of origin from Surrenden-Dering can be established. Elizabeth Dering (1648–1681), called Betty, eldest daughter of Sir Edward Dering, the second baronet, and Mary Harvey, married Robert Southwell (1635–1702) in 1664. Southwell's official career was in Ireland as Clerk of the Council, diplomat, and Secretary of State, and he lived at the time of his marriage at Kinsale, County Cork; sixteen years later, in 1679, he purchased King's Weston, then a comfortable-looking Tudor mansion with complex formal gardens situated on an eminence overlooking the mouth of the Avon and the Bristol Channel. Three years



later, in 1681, Betty died at the early age of thirty-four after prolonged ill health; after his bereavement, and beset by political troubles, he retired from public life for most of a decade to the seclusion of King's Weston, where he tended his garden with the advice of John Evelyn.

His son and great-grandson revolutionized King's Weston; in 1710, the first Edward Southwell, Robert's son, commissioned Vanbrugh to build the King's Weston that we now see; the third Edward inherited a large collection of family portraits and in 1765 employed Robert Mylne to re-design the great saloon in order to display them in three tiers, each painting in a delicately moulded plaster wall-frame.

The earliest reference to the existence of this portrait of Harvey comes in a list of pictures at King's Weston taken in July 1695, formerly preserved among the Dering papers in the Phillipps collection of manuscripts. It records a picture of "Dr Wm Harvy given by the Lady Dering who was his Neece he found out the Circulation of the blood".⁵ The inventory of 1695 was taken fourteen years after Betty's death, but her mother, Mary Harvey, Lady Dering, was still alive. One may surmise that the William Harvey portrait came from Surrenden-Dering as a gift from Mary Harvey, Lady Dering, to her daughter Betty and her husband Robert Southwell, either at Kinsale or at King's Weston, between 1664 and 1681; at King's Weston it had the place of honour to the right-hand side of the fireplace in the great saloon. It has much in common with the Kent and Canterbury portrait; the apparent relationship of both to Surrenden-Dering and Mary Harvey seems more than a coincidence.

The King's Weston portrait has suffered sad vicissitudes, especially in this century. In 1937, King's Weston was sold to the Bristol Municipal Charities, who began to adapt it for the Queen Elizabeth's Hospital School.⁶ The Second World War overtook and put a stop to these plans. Fortunately, many of the valuable fixtures had been removed and the great saloon locked up when King's Weston was occupied by the military. After the war, the work was never resumed, the house became more and more decayed and demolition was apparently the only solution. Keynes⁷ describes how he found the house before 1948, "uninhabited, and more or less derelict, but the huge and lofty entrance hall still contains a large number of the family portraits placed flat on the wall in uniform moulded plaster wall-frames. . . . The Harvey portrait . . . is now in a sad state of decay, but it can never have been a good picture and, I think, is quite certainly not a first-hand representation. . . . It is not very much like Harvey as we know him and conveys an impression of a different personality, a gloomy rather broken down old man, which does not agree with the impression we have formed from other sources."

However, there is a happier ending to this tale of decay. King's Weston was taken over in 1974 by the Avon and Somerset Constabulary as a police training college; the house was restored with a grant from the Historic Buildings Council and is now impressively well cared for. The portraits in the great saloon have been restored and

⁵ Sir Geoffrey Keynes called my attention to this document, Sotheby's Catalogue, *Bibliotheca Phillippica*, n.s. 1, 28–29 June 1965, 28 June, lot 214, p. 91.

⁶ Christopher Gotch, *Country Life*, 23 January 1953.

⁷ Keynes, *op. cit.*, note 1 above, pp. 14, 15.

William Harvey, M.D:
Born at Folkstone, Kent
1578. Died 1657.

Given to the Kent and
Canterbury Hospital, by
G. Best Esq^r. Chilton. 1807.

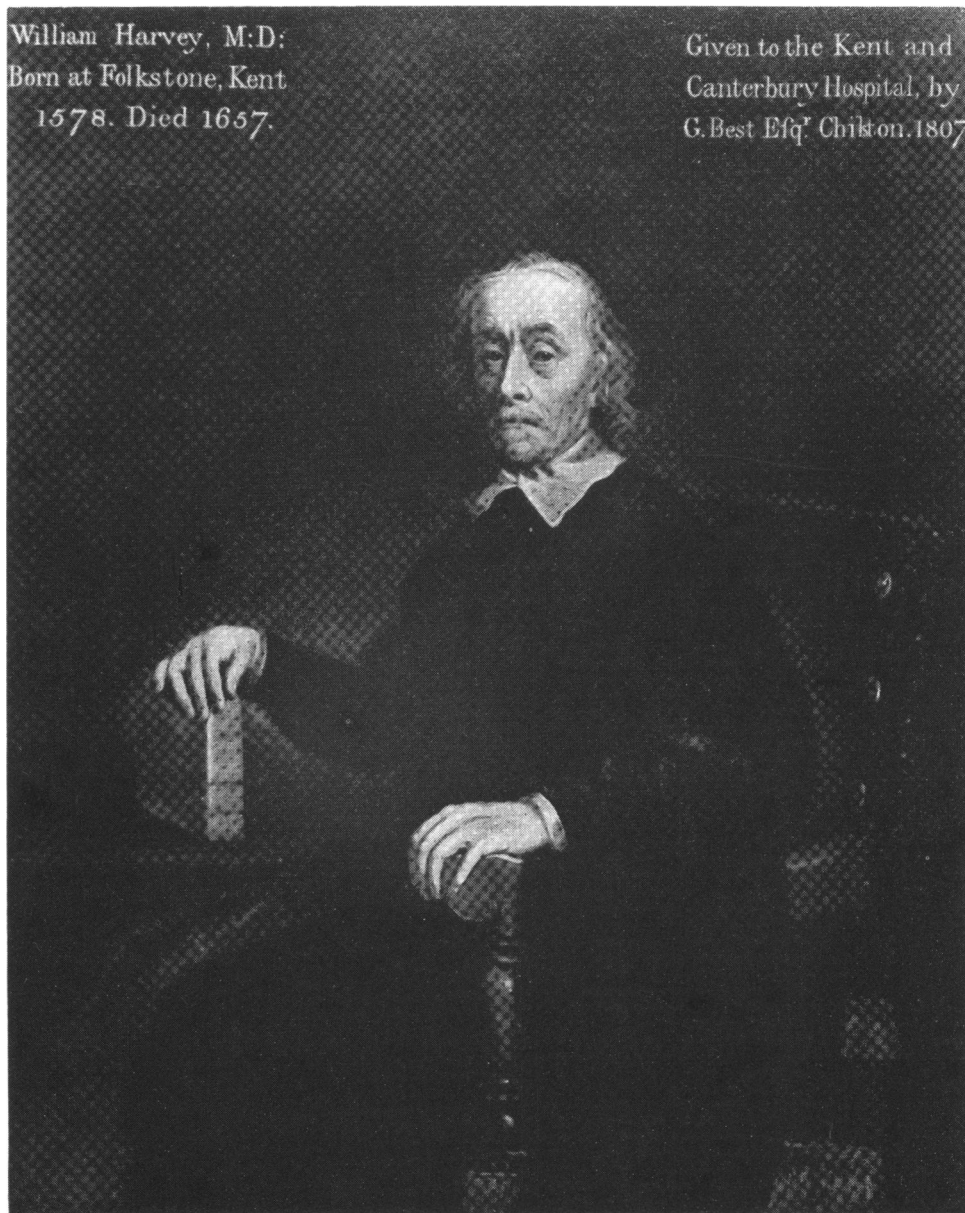


Plate I. Dr William Harvey. The Kent and Canterbury Hospital portrait.

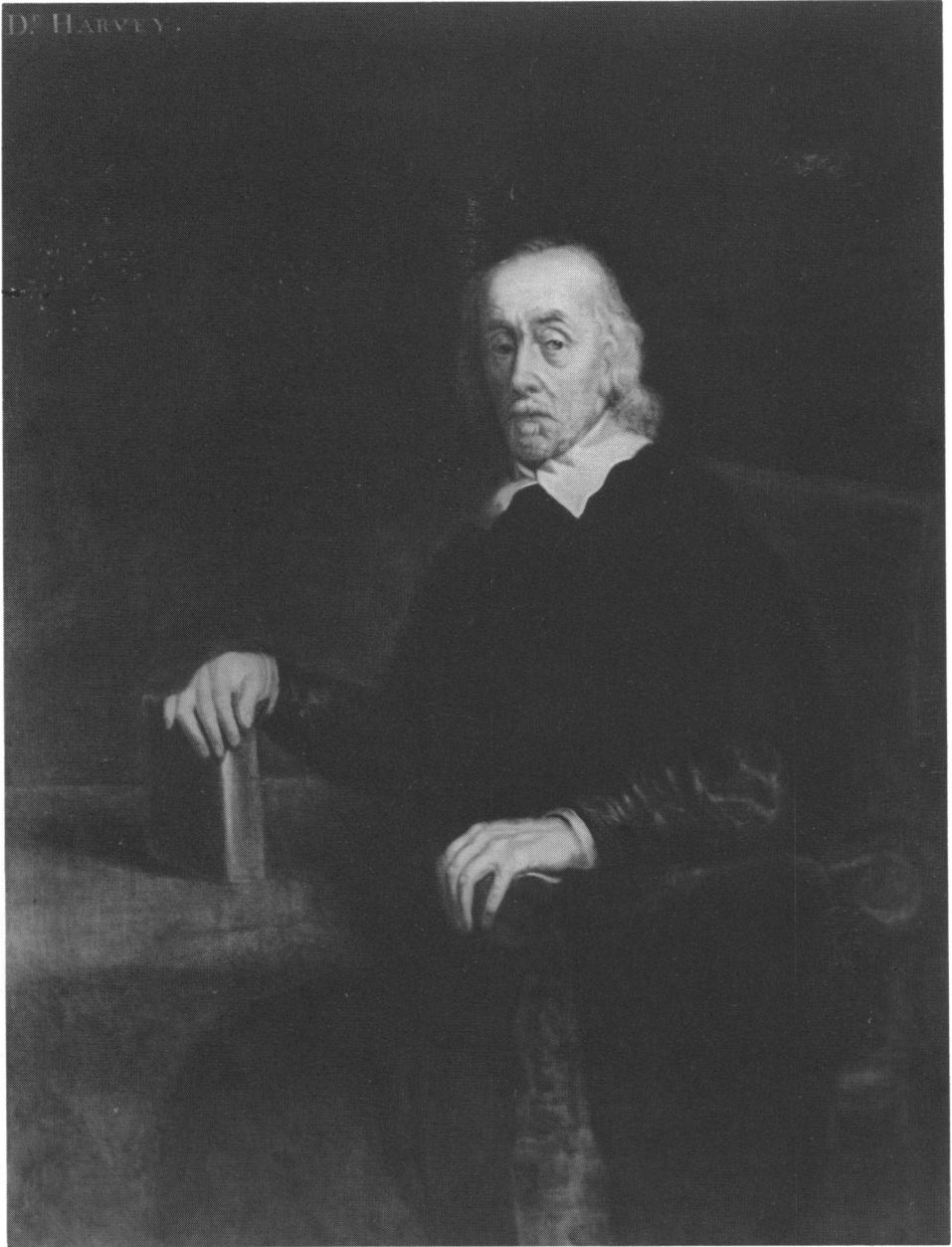


Plate II. Dr William Harvey. The King's Weston portrait.

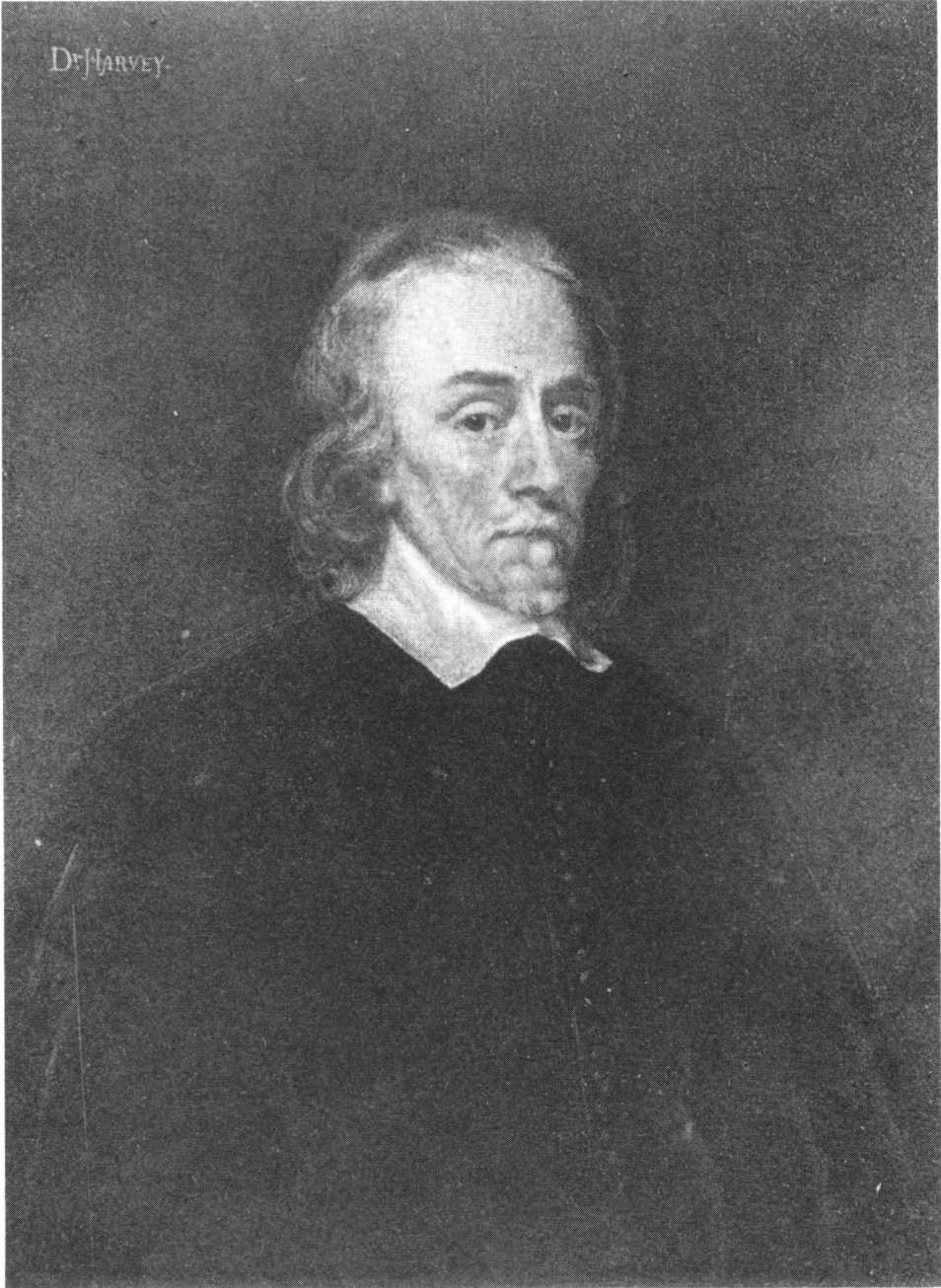


Plate III. Dr William Harvey. The Surrenden-Dering portrait.



Plate IV. Dr William Harvey. The Ditchingham Hall portrait.

replaced in their moulded plaster frames. The Harvey portrait was in the custody of the Bristol Municipal Charities, who had it restored to a condition very different from that in which Keynes found it, and it is now much closer to the Kent and Canterbury version and comparable with it. Dr Harvey has been reinstated at King's Weston to the left of the great fireplace instead of the right.

There is an interesting postscript to the King's Weston story. To the right of the fireplace in the great saloon, in the place formerly occupied by Dr Harvey, is a portrait of Heneage Finch (1621–1682), Mary Harvey's eminent legal brother-in-law who married her elder sister, Elizabeth (1627–1675), in 1646 and was to become Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, Lord Chancellor, and first Earl of Nottingham; he had a close relationship with his uncle-by-marriage, Dr William Harvey, as his lawyer and executor. The painting is well authenticated by a letter from Sir Edward Dering to his son-in-law Robert Southwell dated 2 March 1675 and written from Surrenden.* "If my Lord Keeper's [i.e. Finch's] picture be come from Lillies [the anglicised version of Lely] if any enquiry be made how I will dispose of it say you have orders to take care of it. . . . As soon as you have it I will give orders for a frame and for putting it up, for Ned [his son Edward, later the third baronet] is impatient for it here." This was four years before Southwell's purchase of King's Weston; it seems clear that Sir Edward Dering commissioned the portrait of Finch and that it was to be delivered to Southwell, still living at Kinsale; whether it was returned to Surrenden for Ned's benefit we are not told. If it came to the Southwells as seems likely, Betty was thus furnished with portraits of two of her most celebrated relatives, Uncle William and "my brother Finch", as Sir Edward called him.

OTHER HARVEY PORTRAITS

So far we have been concerned with portraits of Dr William Harvey that might have come from Surrenden-Dering; now let us consider one that certainly did come from Surrenden (Plate III). The late Lord Moran wrote in a letter dated 17 December 1973:

The portrait, hitherto unknown to the public, was discovered by my wife in 1928. She was at that time helping Sir Wilmot Herringham with research for his Harveian Oration on *The Life and Times of William Harvey*. . . . She read in a newspaper that Surrenden-Dering was to be sold with all its contents. She sent for a catalogue and saw that a picture of Mary Harvey, Lady Dering, was in the picture-gallery and she went to Surrenden-Dering to see it. . . . Looking round to see if there was a silver spoon or a book that she could buy she saw on the staircase a dirty portrait which she recognised as William Harvey from her study of Sir d'Arcy Power's book of the then known portraits. At the sale my wife bought this picture for £38. She took it straight to Sir Charles Holmes, the Keeper of the National Gallery, who told her that the evidence of paint, canvas etc. pointed to its being a seventeenth century portrait, and he had the picture cleaned for us. It is in its original frame. We do not know who painted it. It is a sad face, possibly owing to Harvey's distress about the Civil War and worry over the division of the family. . . .

This was Lot 216 in the Surrenden-Dering sale, described as "English School, portrait of Dr Harvey with lawn collar and black dress, 28 IN. × 21 IN.". Keynes⁹ regarded it as a very attractive picture which probably came from the Harvey family

* Sonia Anderson, Dering-Southwell correspondence, Kent Archives Office, 1971, A.31.

⁹ Keynes, *op. cit.*, note 1 above, p. 11.

through Sir Edward Dering; but although we know that it came from Surrenden-Dering, we have no idea how or when it got there, who painted it for whom, and when it was painted; the opinion of Sir Charles Holmes places its origin firmly in the seventeenth century.

The Surrenden-Dering portrait is a half-length version of the famous standing portrait at Ditchingham Hall (Plate IV), a fine Queen Anne mansion on the borders of Norfolk and Suffolk. I have been privileged to see it twice *in situ* (a third time on exhibition at the Royal College of Physicians in 1980), the second time with Sir Geoffrey Keynes in person, who was so impressed with the head that he exclaimed and reiterated on at least three occasions that he thought it was done from life. This represented a change of mind from *The portraiture*, in which he argued that it was perhaps a posthumous production based on the familiar Faithorne engraving, but added: "It is impossible to exclude the possibility that it was painted for Daniel Harvey's family from the life."¹⁰ The relationship to the Surrenden-Dering portrait explains the possible connexion with Daniel Harvey's family but this is only speculation and proof is lacking.

Its own history is of interest; it is known to have belonged to Sir Francis Milman (1746–1821), President of the Royal College of Physicians from 1811 to 1813, who gave it to Dr Richard Bright (1789–1858), the eminent Guy's physician. The date of the gift and the occasion for it are unknown; perhaps Bright attended Sir Francis in his declining years. Bright bequeathed it to his eldest son, Dr James Franck Bright, DD, who became Master of University College, Oxford, from whom it passed to the late Brigadier Carr of Ditchingham Hall, his grandson.

Our concern then is with Harvey in his old age, what did he look like and was his portrait ever painted from life? We all think we know what Harvey looked like and our mental picture is probably an amalgam of several familiar Harvey images. Of the four portraits we have been considering nothing is known for certain about the painters or the dates of painting, but I hope I have been able to suggest some possible connexions. The Kent and Canterbury and King's Weston portraits, even if they were posthumous copies of some original that is no longer in existence, seem to have been legitimized by the Harvey family in the shape of Lady Dering and accepted as worthy likenesses of the doctor in his last years. The search for the original should go on; perhaps one day it will be found.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.