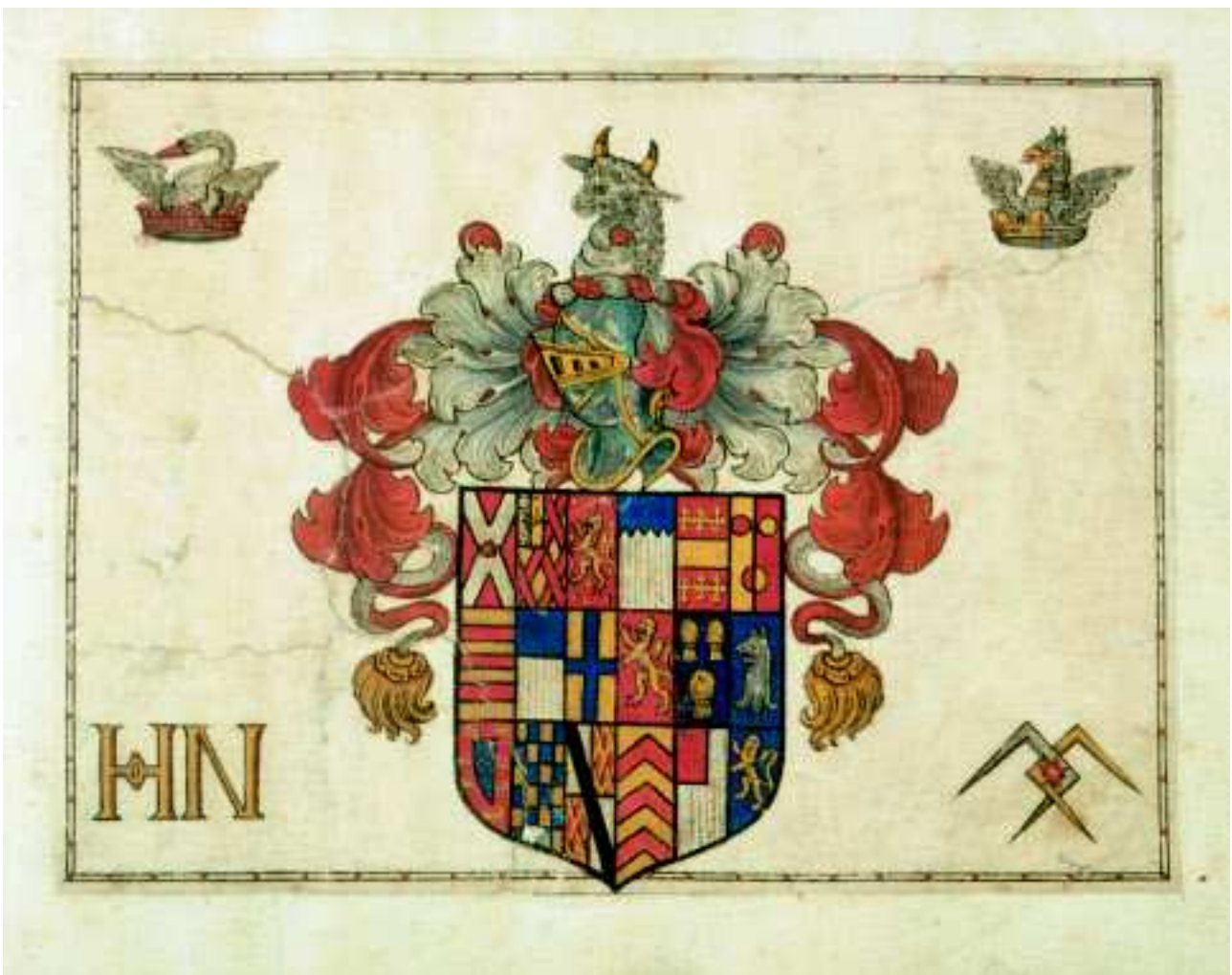


## 6 *My Ladye Nevells Booke*

30 In July 2003, MLA was informed of the offer of a late Elizabethan musical manuscript known as *My Ladye Nevells Booke*. The offer was made with a condition that the book should be allocated to the British Library. The manuscript contains 42 works by the English composer William Byrd (1539/40–1623). There are 192 folios, 19.5 x 27.6 cm, and the music is of four six-line staves to the page. Each of the 42 items has a title in a fine calligraphic hand by John Baldwine of Windsore whose signature appears at the end of the index or “*table for this booke*”. It is dated 1591. One of the endpapers bears a tipped in letter, datable to 1669 which begins, “*This book was presented to Queene Elizabeth / by my Lord Edward Abergavenny.*” There are

occasional manuscript alterations in a different hand which may be that of Byrd himself. The frontispiece is a separate sheet consisting of 18 quarterings of the Nevill coat of arms. Although on different paper, it is likely to be contemporary with the musical manuscript. The volume retains its original brown calf presentation binding.

William Byrd was the leading English composer of the late Elizabethan era. He had been a chorister either at St Paul's or at the Chapel Royal at Whitehall Palace and began to compose music in his late teens. His first known post, c. 1562, was as organist and choirmaster at Lincoln Cathedral where he remained for almost a decade. By 1572 he



6. The coat of arms of Sir Henry Nevill of Bilingbear, husband of 'My Ladye Nevelle'

and fellow composer Thomas Tallis were sharing duties at the Chapel Royal and three years later the two had been granted a patent for the printing of music in England. His position at Court protected him when his name became associated with recusancy. Byrd's son married Katherine Moore, a descendant of Sir Thomas Moore who had been executed for his refusal to support Henry VIII's religious reforms. Byrd retired to Essex in 1594 and for almost the next 30 years his name regularly appears among the lists of those suspected of continued support for the old Catholic religion.

His religious music remains a staple of Anglican cathedral liturgy into the 21st century and his stature as the greatest composer of his

age has, if anything, increased in recent years after the publication of modern critical editions of his music. His achievements in secular music were as great as those in liturgical music and he is recognised as the leading figure in the development of English keyboard music during the 16th century.

The expert advisers noted that Byrd was the leading English composer of the late Renaissance and although best known for his choral music he had also been described as the "*father of all keyboard music*" in whose hands it became "*something entirely new, the outcome of his amazing originality, imagination and fertility of invention*". The manuscript although not in Byrd's hand was one of two contemporary and



6. The tenth of the 42 musical pieces in the book: "*the firste pavian*"

exceptionally trustworthy manuscripts preserving the composer's keyboard compositions. The advisers stated that the fine presentation binding and the meticulously prepared Elizabethan musical manuscript were also of considerable importance. It was noted that the manuscript was the only known source for six of the 42 works it contained and provided the most authoritative text for all but four of them. Although the corrections to Baldwine's text were assumed to be by Byrd the absence of any known music autograph by Byrd precluded a conclusive identification. It was consistent with the composer's known practice at the time of gathering his finest works into collected editions. They accepted the thesis put forward by the Offeror that the manuscript was compiled for Elizabeth Nevill, widow of Sir Henry Nevill of Billingbear and that it might have been prepared with the explicit intention of presentation to Queen Elizabeth. Elizabeth Nevill's principal home was Greenland, at Hambleden in Buckinghamshire, and Byrd and his brothers had homes nearby. The possibility of a local connection between Byrd and Lady Nevill was strengthened by the fact that his daughter-in-law's mother came from a Hambleden family. After Sir Henry's death Lady Nevill remarried, and as Lady Peryam received the dedication of *The First Booke of Canzonets to Two Voyces* by Byrd's colleague and probable pupil Thomas Morley, who had married one of Lady Peryam's servants.

The Panel considered that the manuscript met the first and third criteria, that it was in acceptable condition and, following negotiation, that it was fairly valued. The Panel recommended that the offer should be approved. The Secretary of State accepted this recommendation in February 2005. The amount of tax that was payable by the Offerors was considerably less than the amount that could be satisfied by the acceptance of this offer and the British Library had to raise £404,069. The National Heritage Memorial

Fund generously provided £322,487 towards the acquisition costs and the National Arts Collections Fund made a grant of £24,000. Further help came from the Friends of the British Library (£10,000), the Friends of the National Libraries (£5,000), the Golsoncott Foundation (£37,316) and many public donations (£31,938). The offer was completed in March 2006. The funds raised have also been sufficient to allow the manuscript to be fully digitalised and placed on the British Library's website. The acceptance of this offer settled £575,931 of tax.