

**PATTERNS OF PROGRESS AND SOCIAL  
MOBILITY IN SOME  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE FAMILIES  
*circa 1460 to 1560***

**Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
at the University of Leicester**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Patterns of Progress and Social Mobility in Some Northamptonshire Families: *circa* 1460 to 1560.**

**Dorothy Rice 1996**

The aim of this thesis is to add to the growing body of knowledge about the effects of local and national events on the survival and fortunes of individual families and to explore the contribution of these families to the political scene. The dates, *circa* 1460 to 1560, were chosen partly because this was a period of change and partly because it is a relatively neglected period; bridging as it does the Medieval and Early Modern divide.

The first part explores the financial and political fortunes of ten families. All of them came to be residents of Northamptonshire during this period but this is not a closed county study, a consideration of their activities on a broader front is crucial to the arguments presented. Similarly they were all members of either the upper gentry or lower nobility, but this is not a study of one class or the other. Movement up and down the social scale is an important feature under consideration.

The second part of the thesis uses the family evidence to explore behaviour patterns and relationships and attempts to draw conclusions on routes to success and the impact of outside factors. The multi-faceted approach adopted by most of the families makes these questions very complex. Law and sheep farming emerge as very significant features overall, but political allegiance is a more elusive issue. An examination of power structures reveals the extent to which the Crown was willing to overlook past behaviour if a family retained the confidence of its peers.

The final question concerns the operation of these families as part of a broader 'county community'. The conclusion must be that while they did form local networks, these were not necessarily confined by county boundaries.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

(full reference details will be found in the bibliography)

Baker	G. Baker, <i>The History and Antiquities of the County of Northampton</i> .
Bindoff	S.T. Bindoff (ed.), <i>The History of Parliament 1509-1558</i> .
Bridges	J. Bridges, <i>The History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire</i> .
CCR	<i>Calendar of the Close Rolls</i>
CFR	<i>Calendar of the Fine Rolls</i>
CPR	<i>Calendar of the Patent Rolls</i>
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
FH	Fermor-Hesketh manuscripts at Northamptonshire Record Office
Halstead	R. Halstead, <i>Succint Genealogies of the Noble and Ancient Houses</i>
IPM	<i>Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem</i> .
K	Knightley manuscripts at Northamptonshire Record Office
LP	<i>Letters and Papers of Henry VIII</i>
NRO	Northamptonshire Record Office
PRO	Public Record Office
RCHM	Royal Commission on Historical Monuments
Somerville	R.S. Somerville, <i>History of the Duchy of Lancaster</i>
SS	Stopford-Sackville Manuscripts at Northamptonshire Record Office
VCH	<i>Victoria County History</i>
Visitations	<i>Visitations of Northamptonshire</i> and other counties
Wedgwood	J.C. Wedgwood, <i>History of Parliament, Biographies of the Members of the Commons House</i>

## INTRODUCTION

In modern times Northamptonshire is probably one of England's lesser known counties, but this was not always the case. Situated in the heart of England, a convenient sixty miles north of London, it has been involved in many events of national importance and during the early medieval period it was almost a second capital. At the Great Council in Northampton Castle in 1131 Henry I called on the nobility to swear fealty to Empress Maude and it was from this castle that Thomas a Becket fled the country in 1164. Three Parliaments were held there between 1240 and 1340 and another under Richard II. There was a second royal castle at Rockingham and Fotheringhay was always close to the Crown in ownership. Part of the attraction was the excellent hunting the county offered as the royal forests of Rockingham, Salcey and Whittlewood and various royal deer parks and hunting lodges bear witness. Two English queens came from well established Northamptonshire families. Elizabeth Woodville reputedly met Edward IV in the woods around the family home of Grafton and, although Catherine Parr's father was fairly recently arrived in the county, her mother's family, the Grenes, were long time residents.

Its long, narrow shape, stretching fifty five miles on a north-east/south west axis, gives the county a strategic importance in other ways. It is crossed by both of the important ancient north/south highways of the Great North Road and Watling Street and, more recently, by the M1 motorway. It has boundaries with

seven other counties with few natural obstacles between, in fact it is divided more within itself by its major river, the meandering Nene, than it is from its neighbours. The Nene itself has always been bridged in many places, however, giving neighbours ready access to each other and there has never been any suggestion of a north bank/south bank split. The county presents a fairly cohesive unit in geographical and economic terms; the ground is higher in the west than in the east but the forested areas are spread across the whole county and there is no division into distinctive regions, so characteristic of many counties.<sup>1</sup> A picture of the county as a working unit, however, is marred by the lack of any major internal roads linking parts of the county with each other. Even today progress from east to west is slow.

At times of civil conflict Northamptonshire has rarely been far from the action. The taking of Northampton by royal forces in 1264 was a significant loss in Simon de Montfort's rebellion and Evesham itself is not far to the west. The Battle of Northampton in 1460 heralded the real start of the Wars of the Roses with St Albans only forty five miles to the south and Bosworth Field approximately forty two miles to the north. The Battle of Naseby in north-west Northamptonshire signalled the end of the seventeenth century Civil Wars.

All of these factors make Northamptonshire a significant county to study in relation to national events. Its reasonable travelling distance from London and the fairly frequent removal of the medieval royal court to within its own boundaries made it possible for local families to combine an active involvement in the locality with royal service in some capacity. This being so, it is perhaps surprising that it has attracted limited attention from historians. The only serious attempts at a county history have been by the antiquarians, John Bridges and John Baker, and even the Victoria County History volumes are incomplete. A few

<sup>1</sup> Joan Thirsk suggests that Northamptonshire does exemplify regional diversity in its landscape with a western half of vales and an eastern half of forests, ( 'The Fashioning of the Tudor-Stuart Gentry', *The Bulletin of John Rylands Library*, vol. 72 (i) (1990), p. 74) but the great forests of Whittlewood and Salcey can hardly be said to lie in the eastern half of the county.

family histories have been written but these have concentrated mainly on the late Tudor period onwards. This study is a small attempt to redress the balance.

Since the middle of the twentieth century there has been a great expansion of interest and investigation by historians into the period of English history spanning the end of Medieval England through the great Tudor reigns. Established nineteenth-century ideas have been re-examined and various new theories put forward and argued over. Themes have ranged from economic and social conditions; changes in the nobility; relationships of the nobility and the Crown; the power of the monarchy; a reassessment of the achievements of respective monarchs; and the significance of particular events. Du Boulay discusses the "myth of decline" in the fifteenth century and blames the influence of Shakespeare's history plays and the premature interpretation of the Paston Letters for seeing the period as one of violence and decline.<sup>2</sup> Lander agrees and blames misconceptions on "...nineteenth century prejudice which maintained that an ancient, factious nobility to a great extent destroyed itself during the Wars of the Roses". He points out that "Numerous estate accounts have destroyed earlier impressions of almost universal agricultural depression and declining agrarian incomes, putting in their place an account of highly divergent regional economies".<sup>3</sup>

The idea of large scale changes in the upper levels of society has been slower to respond to reassessment, as have the assumptions that local county communities were largely inward looking and constituted a cohesive force in national politics. One way of moving forward on these latter themes is by the increasingly popular route of looking in detail at the fortunes of particular families from a limited geographical area. Taken individually the value of these studies might be insignificant but as Habakkuk has pointed out "...If enough studies of

<sup>2</sup> F.R.H. Du Boulay, *An Age of Ambition: English Society in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1970), ch.1

<sup>3</sup> J.R. Lander, *Crown and Nobility 1450-1509* (London 1976), p.13.

this kind are undertaken then evidence will be accumulated on which generalisations can be made".<sup>4</sup>

This study attempts to add to this growing body of information by looking at the wealth and social standing of a group of families who all had their main residences in Northamptonshire at some time during the period 1460 to 1560.<sup>5</sup> Consideration will be given to whether any common factors emerge in relation to how and when they experienced success or decline or whether "...the peculiarities of the individual personality and the random unpredictability of biological chance continue to twist each case into something of a sport".<sup>6</sup> While this approach will make it difficult to draw conclusions about general trends, there are some distinct advantages. By looking in detail at only a small group of families it is possible to explore the whole context of apparent peculiarities and avoid the possible pitfalls of misconceptions that come with taking a broad sweep. The choice of a group of families from one small part of the country also presents the opportunity of looking at how families relate to each other and whether the notion of a county community plays a significant part in their personal and business dealings or whether their interests range beyond the confines of geography or county loyalty. Studies that focus too closely on a single county are in danger of overlooking or underestimating evidence that leads beyond the county boundaries. Furthermore, by selecting particular families as the basis of study rather than the more usual approach of categories of family, the potentially misleading gentry/nobility debates can be avoided. In fact all of the families would initially be classed as gentry by any definition but three of them reached the status of minor aristocracy during the period under investigation and others married into both lower and upper ranks of the nobility.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> H.J. Habakkuk, in Finch, preface.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1, p. 242, for the location of these residences.

<sup>6</sup> L. Stone, *Family and Fortune*, (Oxford 1973), p. xv.

<sup>7</sup> The term 'gentry' has usually been applied to men identified as knights, esquires and gentlemen, while 'nobility' refers to those of the rank of baron and above.

### Choosing the families

The choice of families to study in some ways presents the greatest problem. There has been a tendency in the past to look at the higher aristocratic families - partly because the evidence is more complete and partly because at that level "...the speed and the scale of the gains and losses are at their most dramatic ... streaking up to the heights, and sometimes plunging down again with the spin of Fortune's wheel".<sup>8</sup> This can give a misleading view as these families are probably not typical of the nobility and gentry as a broader group. Choice is always limited by availability of appropriate material but Northamptonshire is fortunate in having many important collections of family papers from a range of social levels. Even then the choice is narrowed because not all of these collections cover the period under investigation. Making a selection on the basis of availability presents its own dangers and, as Dr. Finch found, it is "...likely to result in an undue emphasis on the fortunes made and successfully retained, since the records of such families are more likely to have survived than those of a family who suffered ruin".<sup>9</sup> This is not necessarily the case, however, as if the estate itself survived the decline of a particular family, then succeeding families had a tendency to retain all of the existing papers, probably to strengthen their own claim to ancient lineage.<sup>10</sup>

A group of five, mostly lesser known, families has been chosen for detailed study, but in order to increase the possibility of drawing tentative conclusions, a further five families has been considered more briefly. This second group contains some of the more well known names and, in most cases, books and articles have already been written about them. To avoid being totally arbitrary, a conscious effort has been made to choose families with a range of backgrounds.

<sup>8</sup> Stone, *Family and Fortune*, p. xv.

<sup>9</sup> Finch, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> This is certainly true of the Drayton branch of the Grene family. Their papers were absorbed into the Mordaunt archives.



The Grenes, Mordaunts and Knightleys were all well established gentry families before the fifteenth century, while the Empsons and Fermors were aspiring newcomers. Routes to success have also been considered with examples taken from the professional ranks - notably lawyers represented by the Knightleys, Mordaunts and Empsons; merchants as represented by the Fermors who acquired wealth as Merchants of the Staple; and the agricultural route, at least in part, as represented by the Knightleys and the Fermors. The second group of families demonstrates a similar range of backgrounds with the established Catesbys, Treshams, Parrs and Vauxes joined by the rapidly rising Spencers. Amongst this group are more lawyers together with men in military and household service while the Spencers represent a very clear agricultural route to success.

The first part of the study will explore the fortunes and actions of the families themselves in their historical and topographical setting. This is not an attempt to present complete family biographies. The emphasis will be on the social and financial position of each family and on their relationships with each other and their contacts with the wider world at local and national level. Consideration will be given to how they acquired wealth and position (or lost it), where they owned land and how they managed it. Knowledge of who they married and with whom they formed other alliances also makes an important contribution to our understanding of local society. On a more political front are considerations of attitudes to important issues in life such as religion and politics, while official appointments can indicate whether their success or decline owed anything to their relationship with the Crown.

### **The families**

The **Grenes** were a powerful gentry family in the fourteenth century who had their main base in Northamptonshire. Their position was partially

established, and certainly maintained, by a series of good marriages. The senior line kept up a position of at least local importance with all six Thomases being knighted and continuing the tradition of favourable marriages. They seem not to have had any problems during the Wars of the Roses, perhaps they laid low during this period and concentrated on husbandry as they were certainly involved in large scale enclosure in the late fifteenth century. They finally died out in 1506 when Thomas Grene VI had two daughters, both of whom married well. There were some problems at this stage because the girls were under age but they eventually recovered the family estates and then Sir Nicholas Vaux, who had married Anne, the elder daughter, bought out Sir Thomas Parr, who had married Maude.

The younger line had a slightly more chequered history. Sir Henry Grene was caught up in the dynastic struggle at the end of the fourteenth century as a supporter of Richard II and was beheaded in 1399. They were eventually restored to their lands, but not at first to knighthood, and a certain degree of favour was shown as Henry's grandson was made Sheriff of Northamptonshire in 1455. They were obviously still wealthy as when Constance Grene married in 1457 she was described as one of the richest heiresses in Britain. She made a particularly good marriage to John, Lord Stafford, who was created Earl of Wiltshire. When her father died in 1467 the male line died out and although Constance had a son, Edward, he died without issue. His will created controversy which remained unresolved for many years with the eventual beneficiaries being the Mordaunts.

The **Mordaunts** were a very ancient Bedfordshire family. In the mid-fifteenth century they were strong supporters of the Duke of York and Robert Mordaunt (died 1448) impoverished the family estates, possibly because of his involvement in the civil strife. They were soon restored to their position by Robert's son, William, reportedly through frugal living. The family prudently

became Lancastrians and were soon in favour with the Tudor kings as Privy Councillors. Sir John Mordaunt (died 1504) and his son, John, who became the first Lord Mordaunt, were both successful lawyers. Three successive generations married heiresses - probably a combination of their own wealth and royal favour. They were adept at keeping on the right side of royalty, whatever the current situation. John Mordaunt III (died 1571) was knighted at the coronation of Anne Boleyn but his father later took part in her trial! As Roman Catholics they laid low under Edward VI, were then favoured by Queen Mary, but under Queen Elizabeth they once again concentrated on local rather than national interests.

The **Knightleys** were another ancient Northamptonshire family with large estates. They were obviously seen by their neighbours as very marriageable and had kinship ties with many important families. All of the holders of the estate were knighted, sometimes on significant occasions, and they held local office as Sheriffs and Members of Parliament. They added to their estate both by marriage to heiresses and, in some small part, from the Dissolution of the monasteries. A potential problem to expenditure on the estate was avoided when all of Sir Edmund's (died 1542) daughters died young. He was succeeded by his brother Valentine (died 1566) thus consolidating the family wealth.

Of the rising families, the **Empsons** had a notably rapid advance and equally quick decline. Before the fifteenth century they had been a moderately substantial family with clear influence in the Towcester area of Northamptonshire. Richard (died 1510) trained in the law and soon made enough profit to begin to buy land on his own behalf. His work probably brought him into contact with people who became influential friends. He gained royal patronage under Henry VII which enabled him to make successful and profitable marriages for himself, his sisters and his own children. His position led to financial success and political appointments at a national level. Unfortunately for him his means of gaining favour with Henry VII was also to be his downfall as he made powerful enemies

among leading landowners. This was to lead eventually to his attainder and execution under Henry VIII. His lands were eventually returned to his son Thomas (died 1535) but at a cost which put Thomas in debt to the King and forced him to sell off much of his property.

The **Fermors**, on the other hand, maintained a steady rise. The foundation for their success seems to have been based on their position as Merchants of the Staple. Thomas (died 1485) made money by marrying an heiress and his son, William (died 1552), added to this by marriage to four rich women in succession. There were no children from any of these marriages and so the accumulated wealth went to the sons of his brother Richard (died 1551). Richard Fermor was successful as a Merchant of the Staple. He also made important friends such as Cardinal Wolsey and received royal recognition and patronage. He was granted land from other families, married an heiress and gained local position as Sheriff of the county. He also added to his estate by his own purchases, the chief one being Easton Neston from the Empsons. He was soon an accepted member of the local community in Northamptonshire and his children made excellent marriages with important families of ancient lineage, a sure sign of social acceptance. He had some problems after the Reformation as he remained a staunch and outspoken Roman Catholic but was eventually forgiven. His son was knighted and given local honours while his grandson distinguished himself as a soldier.

Of the supplementary families, the **Catesbys** were an established Warwickshire family of lawyers before taking up residence in Northamptonshire in the fifteenth century - the senior line at Ashby St Ledgers and a cadet branch at Whiston. They are best known for William Catesby's (died 1485) support of Richard III and later for their involvement in the Gunpowder Plot. They comfortably survived a change of allegiance from Lancaster to York but suffered from Richard's downfall at Bosworth. The **Treshams** and **Vauxes** were loyal

Lancastrian families with long standing Northamptonshire connections. Although both families began to make their mark in the law they changed to royal household and military service. The **Parrs** were well established in the North West before the second marriage of Elizabeth Parr to Sir Nicholas Vaux (died 1523) brought them to Northamptonshire. The foundation of their success was also military and household service for first Yorkist and then Lancastrian kings. The **Spencers** were a rising family in the fifteenth century with connections to the Catesbys. Like them they made a move from Warwickshire to Northamptonshire during this period. Their initial fortune was based entirely on their successful sheep farming enterprises.

### **Locating the evidence**

Three major collections contained in the Northamptonshire Record Office have formed the basis of the evidence for the five main families, supplemented by public records and previously published material. The secondary group of families have largely been studied via these last two categories of sources.

The Stopford-Sackville collection is a very rich source of evidence on several families. Essentially it is the family archive of the Mordaunts and their descendants at Drayton House, but every time they married into other families the respective family papers became part of the collection. It contains a total of 4,358 unfoliated documents ranging in date from the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries, but a large part of the collection relates to properties acquired by the Mordaunts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, during their rise to prominence. As in most collections, many documents relate to title deeds and general settlements of land and property, but there are also more personal papers - marriage settlements, wills, depositions and letters. The collection also contains a number of papers concerning the junior branch of the Grene family whose Drayton estate was inherited by the Mordaunts upon the death of Edward,

Earl of Wiltshire, whose father, John Stafford, had married the heiress, Constance Grene.

The Fermor-Hesketh collection takes up approximately 75 boxes. It is largely concerned with the estate of Easton Neston, Northamptonshire, which is now in the hands of the Hesketh family. This estate was part of the lands of the senior line of the Grene family who gave their name to Greens Norton, a village a few miles from Easton Neston. Easton Neston itself was bought by Sir Richard Empson from Sir Thomas Grene in 1499 and sold by his son, Sir Thomas Empson, to Sir Richard Fermor in 1530. All three of these families are of interest to this investigation and so this collection should have been a rich source of evidence. In spite of the name, however, the bulk of the documents relate to land purchases by the Empson family with little indication of how, when or why the Grene family sold the estate or the Fermors bought it.

The Knightley Collection, as its name suggests, is concerned with the affairs of the Knightley family who early in the fifteenth century transferred their base from Staffordshire to Fawsley in Northamptonshire. The collection is housed in approximately 110 boxes.<sup>11</sup> It consists largely of charters from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries and deeds up to the nineteenth century.

Apart from these three extensive collections, there are miscellaneous documents in several of the other Northamptonshire family archives and another obvious source of evidence must be the brief biographies given in antiquarian county histories such as Bridges and Baker for Northamptonshire and *Willey Hundred* for Bedfordshire.<sup>12</sup> *Victoria County History* volumes for several counties, the *Dictionary of National Biography* and various books on the peerage families extend this information. In addition a wide range of families are covered by the sixteenth-century *Heralds Visitations*. These cannot be viewed as

<sup>11</sup> This estimate was made by the staff at NRO. It is difficult to be exact as boxes are indexed in a variety of places.

<sup>12</sup> For details of these sources see List of Abbreviations, p. iii.

totally accurate as they relied on family memory for details but they do provide much useful information. As many individuals from the families studied represented their county in Parliament, the two comprehensive works on Members of Parliament by Wedgewood and Bindoff are important references.<sup>13</sup> Together these sources give a good overview of family involvement in wider events. They also give many references for further research such as Charter, Fine and Patent Rolls, Letters and Papers of Henry VIII, wills etc. Wills themselves are a rich source of evidence for social relationships, family status and attitudes to the church and their fellow men.

More general sources, such as Leland's itineraries<sup>14</sup> and old county maps, can reveal important clues to status and geographical location and survivals on the ground such as houses and churches cannot be ignored. At a more specific level for the Grenes and Mordaunts, the seventeenth-century book, *Succinct Genealogies of the Noble and Ancient Houses*, written under the pseudonym of Robert Halstead, is a significant source.<sup>15</sup>

### **Interpreting the evidence**

From the comparatively random accumulation of information on each family it is important to recognise evidence that is essential to the focus of the investigation. Indications of success could be obvious signs of royal favour such as being put into positions of power and influence at local or national levels, gifts of land and being granted access to wardships and heiresses which were usually under the royal prerogative. Other signs of success and status in the community might come from evidence of 'marriageability' i.e. marrying into families of equal or higher status. Evidence of disposable wealth might come from wills and letters etc. Disposable wealth was usually kept in the form of

<sup>13</sup> As above.

<sup>14</sup> *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535-1543* (ed.), L. Toulmin Smith, 5 vols. (London, 1897).

<sup>15</sup> Two copies of this book are located in the British Library.

jewels, plate and expensive clothes. It was an important feature of success as it meant that a family was in a position to take advantage of situations and opportunities such as loans to the king and purchases of land, wardships and marriages. Increasing the family estate by land purchase is an important indication of success as land was a significant sign of status. Growing wealth and status can also be identified by periods of building construction. Indications of decline will tend to be the opposite or lack of the above. For example the sale of ancestral land is a sure sign of a family with problems as is the willingness to marry into families of lower social position.

An understanding of what might be the potential paths or problems in achieving success will also be of help in recognising evidence and in suggesting further lines of enquiry. Within the family itself are the physiological problems of failure of the line, by not producing male heirs, an underage male heir, which might be exacerbated by wardship, or producing too many children who need to be provided for, at least with marriage settlements. Financial problems can also be caused by bad management of the previous owner, be the result of fines or attainder and the ensuing forfeiture of estates or be beyond the control of the individual such as weather or the general economic situation.

Also beyond the control of a family was the political situation, which might or might not work in their favour. The period of history described as the Wars of the Roses was a particularly difficult time for the nobility and even the gentry as there was a strong possibility that at some stage they would be on the wrong side at the wrong time, risking displeasure, attainder or even death. This was less of a handicap for those that were important enough to be forgiven or those not important enough to be noticed. In this latter category were those who laid low and concentrated on their estates, but while this might ensure survival it put them out of the running for any rewards that were handed out to those lucky enough to be actively involved on the right side. Involvement had its advantages as well as



its dangers.

Relationships were important in the battle for survival and success and not just those with royalty. The lower nobility and the gentry needed the patronage of those above them to help them to take the next step up the ladder - usually by introduction to the right people or even direct intercession with the Crown to ensure a profitable appointment for proteges. Conversely it could be dangerous to make enemies as the Tudor court was particularly vulnerable to the power and influence of factions. Even making enemies of one's tenants, such as by unpopular enclosures, could cause a landowner major problems as fear of local unrest was a significant factor in social and political life. Relationships between colleagues and neighbours that offered mutual support were equally important and usually consolidated by the kinship bonds of marriage.

### **Patterns and relationships**

The information gathered on individual families will make it possible to analyse whether any behaviour patterns or significant relationships emerge. We can compare the different routes taken by families to achieve success and consider whether some routes were more popular or advantageous than others. We can look closely at marriage as an important aspect of family success and compare how different families tackled the problem of finding suitable partners. Land was a key factor in medieval times which makes the negotiations associated with it an important source of evidence for the nature and operation of local society. Religion began to be a potential problem during this period; it was certainly the downfall of some important people, but it is usually accepted that for most families it was less significant than it came to be in the latter half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. There have been suggestions that by the sixteenth century dissatisfaction with the church was growing and would have led to an eventual 'reformation' even without Henry VIII's need for a

divorce. Attitudes to the church can be seen in a tangible way from buildings and monuments and also from the tone of wills and the nature of bequests. Probably the most important pattern to look for, however, is the *timing* of the rise and decline in family fortunes. This could provide the strongest evidence for any identifiable relationship between family fortunes and events on the national scene.

### **Power structures and community leadership**

While the impact of turbulent events on family fortunes is interesting to explore, no less important is the 'normal' operation of the country as a whole and of any shift in the balance of power. The first step is to take an overview of leadership within the locality and note any changes over a period of time. The relationship between localities and central power is a more difficult one to pin down. Its operation can only be teased out by examining the nature and extent of formal and informal contacts between the two sides. Its significance, however, is incalculable in our understanding of the workings of late medieval society and the move to Tudor government. Individual family evidence can add a little to the body of evidence in this respect. The final question to discuss is the notion of a county community. All of the families studied came to have a significant base in Northamptonshire during this period, but how important that was to the way they conducted their lives, or to their relationships with each other, is something to be explored.

## THE FAMILIES IN THEIR HISTORICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

### 1. THE GRENE FAMILY

The Grene family were an ancient and influential family with large landholdings in Northamptonshire from at least the fourteenth century but largely forgotten today. Only Sir Henry Grene, who died in 1369, is mentioned by the *Dictionary of National Biography* which is rather surprising considering the family's later connections. By the middle of the fifteenth century they already seemed to be in decline and by early in the sixteenth century they had died out completely. In order to judge their importance and the significance, if any, of their decline it is necessary to look at their earlier history. Their actual descent is somewhat controversial with Halstead, Bridges and Baker<sup>1</sup> all claiming that they were descended from the Boketons who emerged at Boughton, near Northampton, and that the change of name to Grene came about because of the large green at Boughton which was used for important fairs. From being Boketon of the Green they became simply Grene. *Victoria County History* on the other hand identifies them with the Grene family of Isham where, by 1428, at least three generations of Grene had been tenants of William de L'Isle. These Grene family seem to have been wool merchants as a Henry de Grene of Isham was appointed to buy wool in Northamptonshire in 1337, 1338 and 1343<sup>2</sup>. According to this source, in 1340 Sir Thomas de Boketon sold the manor of Boughton to Henry Grene junior, of

<sup>1</sup> For details of these sources see List of Abbreviations, p. iii.

<sup>2</sup> *VCH Northants* 3, p. 190; *CPR1334-48*, pp. 269, 425, 480; *1343-46*, p. 591.

Isham.<sup>3</sup> It looks as though Henry might have been a second son as a Thomas Grene continued to be described as of Isham in 1339.<sup>4</sup> Henry Grene's name is never mentioned in connection with the wool trade; instead he entered the legal profession which was a common practice for second sons.

Henry Grene II had a particularly successful career - he was a judge and probably advocate to the dowager Queen Isabella who granted him Brigstock.<sup>5</sup> In 1345 he was King's Serjeant-at-Law and was knighted in 1354. In 1351 he had the fair at Boughton legally established by charter though its origins are almost certainly much older. In 1358 he had a setback when he was excommunicated for sentencing the Bishop of Ely who was deemed an accessory to the murder of a servant of Lady Wake. The Crown was unable to protect Sir Henry and the other judges from the penalties imposed by the Pope but his actions were seen as loyalty to the King, Edward III, who in 1361 appointed him Chief Justice of England.

In addition to rising to the top of his profession, Sir Henry steadily accumulated land and manors in various parts of Northamptonshire and other counties, demonstrating that it was not just a phenomenon of the fifteenth century and later to profit from the law. Henry made a very good marriage to Catherine, daughter of Sir John Drayton.<sup>6</sup> The Draytons were a branch of the powerful de Vere family, earls of Oxford, and Drayton was part of the inheritance of Robert, the third son of Aubrey de Vere (father of the first Earl of Oxford). The inheritance passed to Robert's son, Sir Henry de Vere, and then to his son, Sir Thomas de Vere. Sir Thomas then did a very unusual thing - he abandoned his famous name and became known as Sir Thomas de Drayton and this was maintained by his descendants. Sir John Drayton (discussed above) was the great grandson of this Thomas.

<sup>3</sup> *VCH Northants* 4, p. 78; *Feet of Fines* 13 Edw III, no. 195.

<sup>4</sup> *VCH Northants* 3, p. 190.

<sup>5</sup> *DNB*.

<sup>6</sup> Sir John Drayton was another of the judges in the case of the Bishop of Ely.

Sir Henry Grene died in 1369 and his will indicates quite strong religious leanings - or maybe a demonstration of his social position. He left the family church of Boughton £40 towards its fabric and also made bequests to various religious houses - 100s to St Leonard's Hospital for lepers, in Northampton, and £20 to the Cistercian nunnery at Swardsley which was situated within the parish of Easton Neston, a manor held by Sir Henry. He also mentions St Andrews Priory, Delapre Abbey and Daventry Priory (like Swardsley all Cluniac foundations) but amounts are unspecified.<sup>7</sup> From the time of Henry's death there are two distinct branches to the Grene family, following the lines of his two eldest sons, both important in their own right.<sup>8</sup> Sir Henry had made an arrangement with his wife's brother, Simon de Drayton and his son, John de Drayton, whereby Drayton and its associated manors were conveyed to his second son, Henry Grene III, providing that he bore the arms of the Drayton family. Thomas Grene, his son by his first wife, inherited the rest of the Grene estate.<sup>9</sup>

Henry Grene III prospered under Richard II and was retained by him for life, but it is not clear whether he served in a military or legal capacity.<sup>10</sup> He was also under indenture to serve John of Gaunt for life for the payment of 50 marks. He was knighted and had a position at court and either through his own or his father's influence he made a good marriage to Maude, the daughter and sole heiress of Thomas Mauduit of Warminster. An even more direct result of royal favour was the granting to Henry of several confiscated estates from men who were banished for treason and conspiracy, including the house of Lord Cobham in London with all its furniture.<sup>11</sup> His wealth can be seen in tangible ways as *Victoria County History* suggests that he was responsible for the rebuilding of

<sup>7</sup> R.M. Serjeantson and H. Isham Longden, *The Parish Churches and Religious Houses of Northamptonshire* (London, 1913), p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> For Family Tree see Appendix 2a, p. 273.

<sup>9</sup> *VCH Northants* 3, p. 231; *VCH Northants* 4, p. 78; *IPM* 43 Edw III, no. 355.

<sup>10</sup> He continued to receive annuities from both sources until his execution in 1399. K.B. McFarlane, *England in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1981), p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> *VCH Northants* 3, p. 237.

the church at Lowick, the village associated with Drayton house.<sup>12</sup> Shields illustrating his own family and their connections with the Mauduits are set into the roof of the north aisle and displayed in the windows of the chancel. Henry clearly made his home at Drayton and his reputation was sufficient to be remembered nearly two centuries later by John Leland when he visited the area about 1558. Leland mentions "The great Grene... that was so great a man in Richard (the seconds) day" and comments on "Draiton village and castelle, the pratiest place in those quarters".<sup>13</sup> Eventually he had to make a choice between his two overlords and his attachment to Richard II brought about his death. As he was trying to defend Bristol Castle in 1399 he was betrayed to John of Gaunt's son, Henry, Earl of Lancaster, who, knowing Grene's loyalty to the King, had him beheaded alongside William Scrope, the Earl of Wiltshire, and confiscated his estates.

This setback in family fortune did not last long as a few months after Henry had gained the crown, Sir Henry Grene's son, Ralph, was restored to all of his father's and mother's estates by Act of Parliament. The extent of these estates can be seen in the *Inquisition Post Mortem* petitions brought by Ralph to establish ownership. There were manors in Hampshire, Wiltshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and Northamptonshire. Of the Northamptonshire portion of the estate, Drayton itself was held from the King in chief and was worth 100 shillings, while nearby Lowick was held from the Earl of Stafford by knight's service and worth 10 marks; Harringworth was held from Lord Zouche and worth 40 shillings; Great Houghton held from his cousin Sir Thomas Grene and worth £4; and various small cotes were together worth £10. The total value of the land in Northamptonshire was £27. 13s. 4d. but this was only a part of the Grene estate.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 240-42.

<sup>13</sup> *Leland itinerary*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>14</sup> *IPM* Vol. XVIII, 1-6 Henry IV 1399-1405, nos. 326-34.

Ralph Grene was shown further favour by being appointed Sheriff for Northamptonshire by both Henry IV and Henry V but this branch of the family was either never restored to knighthood or never took up the option. Susan Wright suggests that knighthood was jettisoned by families under financial pressure - particularly in the middle of the 1460s but this may be an earlier example of the same phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> To reinforce this notion of family choice in relation to knighthood, Ralph Grene's son-in-law, Richard Vere, was pardoned in 1472 "... for his syne for refusal for to be knyght".<sup>16</sup> Ralph made a good marriage to Catherine, the daughter of Anketill Mallory, but he died in 1417 without producing any heirs and was succeeded by his brother John, a minor of only thirteen. Little is known about John Grene except for the fact that he made an apparently undistinguished marriage to Mary, daughter of Walter Grene of Bridgnorth, and they produced four children. There is little indication of the family's financial position in the will of John who died in 1433 and apparently lived at Hardwick rather than Drayton.<sup>17</sup> He left the bulk of his estate in Northamptonshire to his eldest son, Ralph Grene II, while his second son, Henry, got land in Hampshire (no details specified). The only money to be mentioned was the £200 to be raised from the sale of timber at Hardwick for the marriage of his two daughters. A better indication of wealth can be seen in the magnificent alabaster tomb erected to Ralph and his wife in Lowick church. On the specific instructions of the executors, this shows the couple holding hands which might indicate the quality of the marriage relationship. This was an unusual pose in England at this time and Elizabeth Danbury suggests that the idea came from the tomb at Westminster of Richard II and his wife Anne of Bohemia.<sup>18</sup> This might suggest that the family had maintained links with the royal court.

<sup>15</sup> S.M. Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century*, Derbyshire Record Society, vol. 8 (Derby 1983), p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> NRO, SS 3955.

<sup>17</sup> NRO, SS 4238.

<sup>18</sup> E. Danbury, 'Images of English Queens in the Later Middle Ages', *The Historian*, no.46 (1995), p. 6.

Ralph Grene II died fairly young and the estate passed to his brother Henry. In spite of their modest marriage settlements, both of John's daughters married quite well. Margery married Sir Henry Huddleston while Isobel married a relative of the family, Sir Richard Vere of Addington.<sup>19</sup> Henry Grene IV was married twice, to Constance Powlett and Margaret Roos, but only had one daughter, also called Constance. He was of sufficient importance to be appointed Sheriff of the county in 1444, under Henry VI, and again in 1465 under Edward IV. This latter appointment was apparently made verbally.<sup>20</sup> He did not make his grandfather's mistake and ally himself too closely with either side and as a result his "...timely acceptance of changes of government and dynasty brought him safely through the Civil War".<sup>21</sup> Unlike some of his ancestors, Henry's influence seems to have been mostly local. He showed more concern with enlarging the house at Drayton, and maybe adding a tower to the church, than with national affairs - perhaps a wise decision in those troubled times. His local importance was used by the Crown when in 1463 he was commissioned with others to raise £187. 7s. 2.5d from Northamptonshire for the defence of the realm.<sup>22</sup> In 1467 he was required to extend his interests much further afield when he was appointed as Escheator to cover a number of counties as far afield as Essex, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and the adjacent March of Wales.<sup>23</sup> It is possible that he was the Henry Grene who, in 1460, was listed second only to Edward, Earl of March, and before William Hastings and others, when John, Lord Lovell, granted them the manor of Ashby de la Zouche.<sup>24</sup> This suggests a fair degree of social standing beyond the confines of the county.

<sup>19</sup> A cadet branch of the de Vere family which had kept the family name - unlike the Draytons.

<sup>20</sup> *CFR 1461-71*, p. 128.

<sup>21</sup> N.V. Stopford-Sackville, *Drayton House, Northamptonshire, A Short Historical Account of Ownership, Architecture and Contents* (Kettering, 1939), p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> *CFR 1461-71*, p. 99.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>24</sup> *Catalogue of the Huntingdon Papers*, part 1 (London, 1926), P. 69. These papers form part of the Huntingdon Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California.



One explanation for this status is money; Henry was recognised as being a very wealthy man. According to Halstead he had one of the biggest estates in England, none of which he lost "... through those accidents that were incident to the disastrous partialities of that uncertain age".<sup>25</sup> Even allowing for Halstead's tendency to exaggerate, Henry must have had exceptional wealth for a country gentleman as in 1458 his only child, Constance, was sought in marriage by one of the most important noblemen of the day - Humphrey, Duke of Buckingham, for his second son, John Stafford.<sup>26</sup> The difference in rank is made quite clear in the marriage settlement - "Indenture between the high and mighty Humphrey Duke of Bucks on the one part and Henry Grene Squire on the other part".<sup>27</sup> Humphrey's keenness for the marriage is indicated by his agreeing to bear all the costs of the wedding and putting in trust an estate worth 400 marks a year under the trusteeship of Sir William Catesby, Henry Grene and others.<sup>28</sup> The terms of the settlement bound Henry fairly closely to the Duke in relation to what he could do with his estate in the future and if John Stafford died his father had a say in any future marriage of Constance.<sup>29</sup>

The importance of this marriage in terms of land can be seen from a survey taken about 1500 on the death of Edward, the only son of Constance and John. The annual value of the Grene lands was £362 as compared with £240 for land descended from the Buckingham family.<sup>30</sup> As well as value, this survey shows the

<sup>25</sup> Halstead, p. 194.

<sup>26</sup> C. Rawcliffe emphasises the political marriages that Humphrey arranged for most of his other children but makes no comment on the contrast between that situation and the marriage of John and Constance. John's older and younger brothers both married into the Beaumont family with their brides being the daughters of dukes. C. Rawcliffe, *The Rise of the Stafford Family, 1343-1460* (Cambridge, 1978), pp.21-25.

<sup>27</sup> NRO, SS 4254.

<sup>28</sup> Rawcliffe only sees this arrangement in terms of an additional financial burden on Duke Humphrey rather than as a financial gain for the Staffords. *The Rise of the Staffords*, p. 120.

<sup>29</sup> Both Rawcliffe (*ibid.* chap.6) and T.B. Pugh suggest that by 1450 the Duke of Buckingham was facing financial difficulties. This would have made the wealthy Grene an attractive proposition for a younger son. 'Magnates, Knights and Gentry' in S.B. Chrimes, C.D. Ross and R.A. Griffiths (eds.) *Fifteenth Century England 1399-1509* (Manchester, 1972), p. 106.

<sup>30</sup> NRO, SS 3751.

extent of the estate as every manor is recorded with how it was held from the King. It is interesting to note that the land was still described as 'Grenes landis' after two generations in the hands of the Stafford family - a good indication of the lasting significance of the link between a family and land ownership.

Henry Grene died in 1467 but, as with his father, his will reveals little of the family fortune.<sup>31</sup> Several manors were named in relation to small bequests but the bulk of the estate was left to his daughter Constance and her husband. The will, however, came to have significance at a later date as, in spite of its vague wording, it played a major part in deciding the descent of the estate after the death of Henry's grandson. The important phrase is "...for default of such issue [to Constance] the remayndre therof to my right heysrs". A second family tomb in Lowick church, this time of marble surmounted by brass, pays tribute to the family's wealth.

After his marriage to Constance, John Stafford made a wise move in abandoning the Lancastrian interests of his own family and adopting the more pragmatic view of his father-in-law. As a result he avoided his father's fate, was reconciled to Edward IV and in 1469 was created Earl of Wiltshire by him. According to Bridges he was later made a Knight of the Garter and used by the Crown "... in several affairs of moment" such as in 1472 when he was appointed as a commissioner with the Earl of Newcastle to liaise with the ambassadors of James III of Scotland over grievances on both sides.<sup>32</sup>

John Stafford died in 1473 and his will at last brings some indication of the family financial situation.<sup>33</sup> Landed wealth was still important but in an increasingly money orientated society the ability to raise 'ready cash' could make an enormous difference in improving family fortunes. With cash one could purchase wardships, marriages, make loans to other people and, perhaps most

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<sup>31</sup> NRO, SS 3451.

<sup>32</sup> Bridges ii, p. 250.

<sup>33</sup> NRO, SS 3967.

important of all, make loans to the Crown in return for royal favour - a necessary step to further advancement. We do not know how John used his wealth but we do know from his will that he had it available, and we also know that some of it came from his wife's family which might provide a clue as to how the Grenes had achieved their own position.

Money was not kept as cash but translated into items of value such as jewellery, clothes and gold and silver plate: all of these items were in John's possession. The plate that Constance had brought to the marriage is not specified but passed intact to his son as a family inheritance. Other plate that he bought himself is mentioned in more detail and this he seems more free to dispose of as he wished. The two gilt pots, six gilt bowls, two gilt basins and a gilt cup (which were in the possession of Oliver Sutton)<sup>34</sup> were to be sold to pay off his debts and he bequeathed two gilt salts to his sister of Shrewsbury.<sup>35</sup> He left a chain of gold to Ann Whittlebury and various gowns were left to churches - a gown of black velvet to the church of Lowick and three silk gowns to the college at Pleshey, which was the Stafford family church, where he was to be buried in a marble tomb. The size of his household is not mentioned but it consisted of gentlemen and women who each received 5 marks, yeomen who got 20 shillings, grooms who got 13s. 4d. and pages who received 3s. 4d.

There are two other items of interest in John's will. One is the relationship with the Talbots of Shrewsbury and the fact that he named his nephew, Thomas Talbot, as his heir after his son. The other concerns his son who was obviously a minor at the time.<sup>36</sup> Being mindful of the problems that wardship and marriage of an heir could bring he beseeched the King

... for all the trew s[er]vice that I did him I desire that my lady my mother may have the keping of my sayd sonne and I beseche the Kyngs gode grace that my said sonne be nev[er] maryed under the estate of a baron.

<sup>34</sup> Oliver Sutton was a friend and executor of John Stafford.

<sup>35</sup> She was married to the Earl of Shrewsbury.

<sup>36</sup> He was only three years old according to Bridges ii, p. 250.

It is interesting to note that it was his mother that he named to look after his son and not his own wife, Constance, who was clearly still alive. Perhaps this was because the Staffords carried more weight in influential circles than the Grene.

Constance may not have had control of her son but she clearly had some control of the Grene estate as she granted the manors of Comberton (Bedfordshire), Hardwick (Northamptonshire) and Buckworth (Huntingdonshire) to her mother for life. Many of Northamptonshire's foremost gentry were among her feoffees.<sup>37</sup> She died in 1474 and her will makes no mention of her son, Edward.<sup>38</sup> She chose to be buried at Pleshey with her late husband, rather than at the Grene family church at Lowick, and piety and charity come through strongly in her bequests. She left the Master of Pleshey College 6s. 8d., every priest there 3s. 4d. and every clerk 20d. Other churches that she was connected with were to get a vestment each at the discretion of her executors and she wanted her silk gowns to be used to the worship of God. She left 40 shillings to every gentleman and gentlewoman in her household, 20 shillings to every yeoman and 10 shillings to every groom and wanted them all to be provided with "mete, drynk and wages" for a year if her estate would bear the cost and if they wanted to stay. Lowick church was remembered with 62s. 8d. "for tithes for gotten".<sup>39</sup> The residue of her goods were to be disposed of by her executors and used for the good of her soul and of others. She made Margaret Grene (her mother) her executor alongside John Catesby, Serjeant-at-Law, Robert Whittlebury (her stepbrother) among others. She particularly wanted Thomas Billing, the Chief Justice, to know the terms of her will but the significance of this is not apparent.

Margaret Grene herself died the next year and the church at Lowick

<sup>37</sup> For example - Thomas Billing, Chief Justice, Sir William Catesby, John, Lord Zouche, John Catesby, William Catesby, Robert Whittlebury. NRO, Mackenzie (Hardwick) Collection, 10-14.

<sup>38</sup> NRO, Early Northamptonshire Wills, f 19 R.

<sup>39</sup> This is an unusually large amount but there is no doubt that this is what is written in the will.

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benefited from further small bequests - 20 shillings each to the Lady chapel and the chapel of St John the Baptist and a "... hole sewte of vestmientys".<sup>40</sup> Piety seems to have run in the family as she appointed two priests at Lowick to pray for her soul for five years and left money to other churches to do the same. The writ to the Escheator on her death showed that she had lands in Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire as well as Northamptonshire.<sup>41</sup>

Edward Stafford eventually succeeded his father as Earl of Wiltshire and married Margaret, daughter of Viscount Lisle. By the time Edward was of age Henry VII had taken the crown and the young Earl not only acquiesced with this change of dynasty in the prudent manner of his grandfather Grene, he followed his Stafford ancestors and actively supported the Lancastrian cause in a military capacity. He was with Henry VII in 1497 at Blackheath in the battle against the Cornish rebels. Here he contracted a sickness which was to prove mortal and he died at Drayton in 1498/9 without having produced an heir. Although he left a will, the inheritance was disputed for twelve years with numerous depositions being taken about his presumed intentions. The resulting collection of documents give a fascinating account of the events leading up to his death.<sup>42</sup>

Edward's actual will is even more detailed than his father's and shows that he was in a position to add to the family treasures by the purchase of bowls of silver etc. He was well supplied with fine clothes, robes of velvet and damask and fine furs as well as his robes of state and parliamentary robes, and he clearly lived in some comfort with feather beds, tapestries, carpets, damask pillows and even coverings of gold and velvet on his bed.<sup>43</sup> A final family tomb was to be added to the church at Lowick - this one of alabaster with an elaborate effigy - and the church also benefited from his "... trapper of cloth of gold".<sup>44</sup> Many

<sup>40</sup> NRO Early Wills, f 18 v.

<sup>41</sup> CFR 1471-85, no. 327.

<sup>42</sup> NRO, SS 2640, 2641, 2642, 3369, 3686.

<sup>43</sup> NRO, SS 4015.

<sup>44</sup> Serjeantson and Longden interpret this as horse trappings. *Parish Churches*, p. 143.

manors are listed in several counties, some of which can be identified as belonging to the Grene inheritance and some bought by his father. He named his uncle, Robert Whittlebury, William Field,<sup>45</sup> William Marbury, Thomas Montagu and Sir John Blake as his executors and his cousin, the Earl of Shrewsbury, as surveyor of his will. He left his wife provided for for life and some specific manors were willed to the Duke of Buckingham but for the rest he wanted the last wills of his father, mother and grandfather Grene performed.

The dispute over the inheritance really began the morning that Edward set off for the Battle of Blackheath. Evidence for the events which took place are provided in a deposition taken fourteen years later in 1511 from Robert Marbury who was at that time a Gentleman Usher of the Chamber to Edward.<sup>46</sup> In the event of anything happening to him in the coming battle, Edward wanted to make sure his wife was provided for and, according to Robert, he sent for her in order to present her with the title deeds of the manor of Drayton. She did not think much of that, said that she would only thank him if he gave her Warminster<sup>47</sup> and threw the deed on the floor. Edward was enraged, he asked Robert to pick up the deed then broke the seal and threw it out of the window into the moat, saying to his wife that someone else would have it that would be more grateful for it. The Earl then went into the great chamber and called Robert to him and commanded him that if anything should happen to him Robert should testify that his

... full myend & last will was & shuldbee that hys cossyn Erle of Shrewesbury shuld have to hym & hys heyres forev[er] the sayd man[or] off Drayton & all hys other fee symple lands aft[er] his detts weer payde.

As soon as got back from the battle and his boots were off he called Robert to him and asked if he remembered those words and said he was still of the same

<sup>45</sup> Master of the college of Fotheringhay.

<sup>46</sup> Presumably a relative of William Marbury who was an executor.

<sup>47</sup> A manor that the Grene had inherited via the marriage of Sir Henry Grene to Maude Mauduit.

mind.<sup>48</sup> The outcome of the case and further details will be described later in the chapter on the Mordaunt family. Suffice it to say that the Earl of Shrewsbury lost and the heirs of the house of Grene inherited the whole estate: the custom of lasting family right to land triumphing over the apparent wishes of the testator and the written direction of his father. Five girls shared the estate - Elizabeth Cheyne, who was the daughter of Henry Grene's sister Margery, and the four granddaughters of her sister Isobel who had married Richard Vere of Thrapston.

An *Inquisition Post Mortem* taken in 1500 at the death of Elizabeth Cheyne recalls the descent of the estate.<sup>49</sup> At the time of the inheritance, Elizabeth Vere was thirteen, Anne was eleven, Constance eight and Audrey six. All four girls were wards of the King who granted them to William Field. William sold the marriages of Elizabeth, Anne and Audrey to John Mordaunt and of Constance to Alice Fitzhugh. Alice was undoubtedly related to Elizabeth Fitzhugh, the first wife of Sir Nicholas Vaux, as she granted this marriage to Elizabeth's son by her first husband, John Parr. Elizabeth Cheyne's share of the estate passed, on her death, to Elizabeth, the eldest of the Vere sisters. John Mordaunt had married Elizabeth to his eldest son, John, and Anne to his second son Robert.

Unfortunately Robert soon died and Amy was married to John Mordaunt's nephew, Humphrey Brown. Audrey Vere had been married to John Brown. The estate was thus kept within a tight family circle and the inquisition revealed that John Mordaunt had been taking all the profits.

The senior line of the Grene family survived for several more decades but very little evidence on them is available. When Sir Henry Grene died, in 1370, he left the residue of his estate (i.e. everything except Drayton and its associated manors) to his eldest son, Thomas, who was allowed a respite of time for showing homage because he was fighting in France.<sup>50</sup> Instead of taking over the

<sup>48</sup> NRO, SS 2642.

<sup>49</sup> *IPM Hen VII 20-24*, second series vol. III, no. 757.

<sup>50</sup> *VCH Northants* 3, p. 231; *CCR 1369-74*, pp. 48, 53.



traditional family home at Boughton, Thomas Grene seems to have established himself at Greens Norton, a manor which, together with the hundred named after it, he and his father had bought in 1355 for 20 shillings. At the time it was known as Norton Davy but later took its name from its new owners. The Grene's held Norton directly from the King - the manor for knights service and the hundred for the payment of 54 shillings a year to the Sheriff.<sup>51</sup> Thomas and his descendants maintained there a manor house and a park of 200 acres. Tombs to the family were to be found in the local church but these were badly damaged in the nineteenth century thus reducing their value as indicators of family status and wealth.

Succeeding generations of this branch of the Grene family named the eldest son Thomas which makes for confusion in tracing the family history. Baker identifies six generations of Thomas with their respective brides and suggests that Bridges had assumed only three generations. A careful reading of Bridges, however, shows four generations with Thomas Grene I and II being confused and V missed out altogether.<sup>52</sup>

Unlike his brother, Henry, Thomas Grene I retained his knighthood as did all of his descendants. He took a bride from further afield than his brother when he married the daughter and heiress of Sir John Mablethorp of Lincolnshire. Thomas died in 1391 and was succeeded by his son Thomas II who also made a good marriage to another distant bride - Mary, the second daughter of Richard, Baron Talbot of Goodrich, Herefordshire. Changes of monarch did not seem to affect Thomas Grene II as in 1390 he obtained a grant of free warren in Norton, Sywell and Ashby from Richard II and later was appointed Sheriff for the county in 1416 by Henry V. The next year he was granted the wardenship of Whittlewood forest for the annual payment of 33s. 4d<sup>53</sup> but died the same year

<sup>51</sup> Bridges i, p. 240.

<sup>52</sup> Baker i, p. 32; Bridges, *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Bridges i, p. 240.

and was succeeded by his son Thomas Grene III. His widow retained as her dower one third of the hundred and manor of Norton and one third of the rest of the Grene estate until her death in 1433.<sup>54</sup>

Sir Thomas Grene III was rather more active in public affairs as in 1425 he was MP for the county and was twice its Sheriff - in 1441 and 1454. He married Philippa, daughter of Robert, fourth Baron Ferrers of Chartley, Staffordshire, and granddaughter of Edward, Baron de Spencer. He died in 1457/8 and their son, Thomas Grene IV, was the last of the family to have public office - as Sheriff in 1457. Either Thomas Grene III or his son was to be found in the company of the likes of William Tresham, Robert Catesby and Thomas Billing witnessing legal transactions in the area.<sup>55</sup> The tradition of good marriages persisted as the bride of Thomas Grene IV was Maude, daughter of Sir John Throgmorton of Coughton, Warwickshire and Under Treasurer of England. Thomas was appointed Escheator in 1462 with his brief covering Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Buckinghamshire and Leicestershire.<sup>56</sup> At his own death in the same year, Escheators were appointed in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Hertfordshire, Leicestershire, Buckinghamshire and Kent which gives a good indication of the extent of his estate. He was succeeded by his son, Thomas Grene V, who was forty three years old at the time<sup>57</sup> and not the infant of one year old as suggested by Bridges. The *Inquisition Post Mortem* makes it clear that the family had retained the wardenship of Whittlewood forest for knights service and the rest of the estate was valued as follows - Norton itself was worth the very large sum of £86. 13s. 4d; Pitsford worth £6. 10s; Mears Ashby worth £10. 2s; Doddington worth £13. 6s. 8d; Boughton and Brampton worth £26. 10s; Great Houghton worth £8. 6s. 8d; and Middleton worth £3. 6s.8d. making a grand total of £154.

<sup>54</sup> *IPM Hen VI*, no. 20.

<sup>55</sup> *CCR 1441-47*, pp. 63, 191. An indication that the law was still a family tradition.

<sup>56</sup> *CFR 1461-71*, pp. 4, 65.

<sup>57</sup> *IPM 20-24 Henry VI*, second series vol. III, no. 1004.

12s. A second *Inquisition* details land in Leicestershire worth £44. 6s. 8d.<sup>58</sup> The profits from this estate had been taken first of all by his widow, Maude, and then by his son without the King's permission but this does not seem to have been held against them as in 1506 the family were in possession of the same estate plus land at Sywell, Potcote and Little Higham worth £10.<sup>59</sup> In 1472 Maude was remarried to Richard Middleton esq. but this was also without the King's permission and resulted in her dower being taken away. Later in the same year she was forgiven for this trespass on payment of a fine and her dower was ordered to be returned to her.<sup>60</sup> Six months later Thomas Billing returned Norton to her and she retained it for life.<sup>61</sup> Ten years later she and Richard Middleton renounced the third of lands left to her by her first husband in favour of her son, Thomas, and she exchanged land worth £46 for other land to the value of £40 in Great Houghton etc. which enabled Thomas to consolidate his estate.<sup>62</sup> Richard Middleton apparently took Greens Norton as his residence as on his death he required to be buried in a marble tomb under the north wall in the church there.<sup>63</sup> Maude is identified as founding a chantry at Norton in 1496 which at the Dissolution was found to have land in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire to the value of £10 a year.<sup>64</sup> There was also a house built for the chantry priest opposite the south wall of the churchyard.<sup>65</sup> Setting up a chantry was an expensive undertaking and is a good indication of wealth. The Ecclesiastical Survey of 1535 valued this chantry at £6 per annum and by 1546 this had gone up to £10. 10s. 9d of which £7. 4s. 7d. was the priests salary. There were also

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1162.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 259.

<sup>60</sup> *CCR 1468-76*, no. 861.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1145.

<sup>62</sup> *CCR 1476-85*, no. 919.

<sup>63</sup> NRO, Early Northamptonshire Wills, f 89 R & V.

<sup>64</sup> Baker i, p. 32.

<sup>65</sup> F. Whellan, *History, Topography and Directory of Northamptonshire* (Northampton, 1874), p. 518.

jewels and ornaments valued at £5. 4s. 3d.<sup>66</sup>

The marriage of Thomas Grene V was a more modest one to Marina, the daughter of John Beler of Eye Kettleby, Leicestershire. She was, however, a co-heiress with her brother of their father's estate. The date of the death of Thomas V is unknown but was presumably fairly young as his widow remarried in 1483. Perhaps it was on the death of Thomas Grene V that the heir was only one year old with the manor of Norton being settled in trust on Thomas Billing, Chief Justice, as described by Bridges.<sup>67</sup> The last Sir Thomas Grene also made a comparatively modest marriage to Jane, daughter of Sir John Fogge of Repton, Kent. It is worth noting from how wide an area and from how far afield came the Grene brides. Each one from a different county with no hint of geographical or family connections to link them to each other or to the Grene family itself. One can only wonder how an apparently minor, rural knightly family came to be known to some of these important families and why they wanted to form alliances. Money is the obvious answer; if Sir Henry Grene of Drayton was noted for his wealth it seems reasonable to suppose that his elder brother was similarly well endowed. In addition it has been suggested that the family continued the tradition of becoming lawyers and as such would command some degree of respect and influence. There is certainly evidence that at least at a local level they moved in influential circles.

This is particularly true of Sir Thomas Grene VI who was named as a feoffee alongside Sir George Grey, Earl of Kent, Edward Stafford, Earl of Wiltshire, John Fisher, Kings Serjeant, and Richard Empson in the *Inquisition Post Mortem* on Elizabeth Tanfield<sup>68</sup> and, in 1483, was found in the company of the up and coming William Catesby, of Ashby St Ledger, and Richard Empson, of Easton Neston, receiving a grant of land in Bradden, Apethorp and Norton from

<sup>66</sup> Baker iii, p. 67.

<sup>67</sup> Bridges i, p. 240.

<sup>68</sup> *IPM* Hen VII 20-24, vol. III, no. 1002.

John Goodman.<sup>69</sup> In the same year he sold two closes in Easton Neston to Richard Empson<sup>70</sup> and in 1498 Richard recovered seisin from Thomas and his grandmother Maude for the manor of Easton Neston in Hulcote.<sup>71</sup> This sale was quite substantial as it involved 5 messuages, 4 tofts, 1 mill, 12 virgates, 42 acres of meadow, 200 acres of pasture, a small fishery and rents to the value of 20 shillings a year. Often when a family is found to be selling off ancient family lands it is seen as evidence of decline but in this case it could be just a favour to an influential friend. Richard Empson had previously acquired other land in Easton Neston in 1476 and obviously wanted to establish his base there as he followed this agreement with obtaining a licence from the King to create a park.

There is also evidence that Thomas Grene VI had begun to move into wider circles. His name is mentioned in a deposition regarding the departure of Edmund de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk but it is not clear what part he played.<sup>72</sup> When Henry VII gained the throne in 1485, Thomas benefited from the fall of his erstwhile associate as he was granted for life the offices of Constable of the castle of Moreend, Northamptonshire, and Keeper of the park there with such wages as "William Catesby esq., our rebelle, deceased, late had and enjoyed in the same".<sup>73</sup> In 1488 he was part of an inquiry into the actions of the Duke of Norfolk<sup>74</sup> and in 1489 he was part of a commission to enquire into numbers of archers before the expedition for the relief of Brittany. Here he was in the illustrious company of Edward Stafford, Earl of Wiltshire, Richard Woodville, Earl Ryvers, George, Lord Grey, Sir Nicholas Vaux and Sir Guy Wolston.<sup>75</sup> Later the same year, together with Sir Nicholas Vaux and Richard Empson, he was

<sup>69</sup> NRO, GI 45.

<sup>70</sup> NRO, FH MTD/E/28/5.

<sup>71</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/14/2. That is he took actual possession of the land.

<sup>72</sup> *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Reigns of Richard III, Henry IV*, (ed.), J. Gairdner, vol. i, (London, 1861), p. 226.

<sup>73</sup> *Materials for a History of the Reign of Henry VII*, (ed.), W. Campbell, Rolls series (1873-77, Kraus reprint, 1965), i, p. 70.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* ii, p. 241.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 385.

appointed to the Commission for *Oyer and Terminer*.<sup>76</sup> He maintained his favoured position as he was also listed among the retinue that met the French representative for discussions on peace with France and was one of those appointed to meet Catherine of Aragon; presumably the occasion was in 1501 when she came to marry Arthur, Prince of Wales.<sup>77</sup>

The parish of Greens Norton had long had a number of small settlements in addition to the main village where the manor house was situated. These were Caswell, Field Burcote and Duncote. None of these settlements was recorded until the thirteenth century but the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments thinks that they are certainly older than that and are probably listed silently in Domesday under the royal manor of Norton.<sup>78</sup> Sir Thomas Grene was clearly attracted by the practice of enclosing land to create sheep walks - a profitable enterprise for landowners at the expense of the tenants. In 1499 he destroyed four houses at Field Burcote and enclosed 200 acres and in the same year he destroyed another four houses and enclosed 304 acres at neighbouring Potcote, a small hamlet in the parish of Cold Higham. Ten years later, in 1509, Sir Nicholas Vaux (who had married one of the Grene heiresses) enclosed a further 300 acres at Caswell and destroyed five houses. There is no record of any protest over these enclosures nor any indication as to their immediate use, but by the middle of the sixteenth century they were being used by a John Hickling for 2,000 sheep.<sup>79</sup>

Sir Thomas Grene VI died in 1506 without a male heir and his estate was divided between his two daughters - Anne who was seventeen years old and Maude who was just thirteen. During the minority of these girls their guardianship and the estate were claimed by the Bishop of Winchester, Sir Giles Daubenay,

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 480.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 291, 410.

<sup>78</sup> RCHM *Northants.*, iv, pp. 71-73.

<sup>79</sup> K.J. Allison, M.W. Beresford and J.G. Hurst, *Deserted Villages of Northamptonshire*, Leicester University Department of English Local History Occasional Paper 18 (Leicester, 1966), pp. 40, 45, 36.

Sir Charles Somerset and others but the next year this was disputed and "... when the cause should have been tried, the demandants making default, judgment was given in favour of the defendants."<sup>80</sup> Soon after this judgment Anne married Sir Nicholas Vaux of Harrowden, Northamptonshire, a family well acquainted with her father. Vaux was probably behind the resistance to the wardship claim.

The Vauxes were a leading Roman Catholic family and very wealthy in their own right. In 1508 Sir Nicholas, Anne his wife, and Maude her sister, obtained a grant from the King to receive the profits of the lands which were then described as being in the wardship of the King.<sup>81</sup> In the same year, Sir Thomas Parr of Kendal, Vaux's stepson, was granted the marriage of Maude.<sup>82</sup> Sir Thomas soon enabled the Grene inheritance to be reunited by selling his wife's share to Sir Nicholas Vaux who was found to be in possession of the whole estate at his death in 1523.<sup>83</sup> In 1535 Vaux's son sold it to Sir Arthur Darcy of Great Addington who conveyed it to the king in exchange for the site of Salley [?] Abbey in Yorkshire.<sup>84</sup> Thus the Grene inheritance passed out of the hands of their descendants.

Although the family name had died out with the marriages of Anne and Maude, the Grene descendants were soon to reap greater honours than they had dreamt of. Maude and Sir Thomas Parr had three children; a boy, William, and two girls, Anne and Catherine. In his youth William attended on Henry VIII and took an active part in the tournaments held to celebrate the meeting of Henry and the King of France. Presumably as a result of royal favour he was created Baron Parr in 1538. The youngest girl, Catherine, reached even greater heights when she became the sixth and last wife of Henry VIII. Through her influence her

<sup>80</sup> Bridges i, p. 240.

<sup>81</sup> Baker i, p. 33; *CPR* 1494-1509, p.1, m. 20.

<sup>82</sup> Baker ii, p. 60; *CPR* *ibid.*, p. 2, m. 28.

<sup>83</sup> Baker, *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

brother William was created Earl of Essex in 1543 and in 1547 Edward VI created him Marquis of Northampton.<sup>65</sup> In 1550 the ancestral Grene lands of Norton returned to the family line as part of the Honour of Grafton.

While it is beyond dispute that the Grene family did, indeed, die out during the fifteenth century, it is clear that there was nothing significant or untoward in this timing. They were merely following a familiar pattern of family continuity for about 200 years before dying out for lack of male heirs. In the case of the Grene of Drayton this happened to be soon after the Yorkist dynasty took the throne but not before Henry Grene had been shown the same favour by Edward IV as by the Lancastrian Henry VI - that of being made Sheriff of Northamptonshire.

The Greens Norton branch of the family survived for another half century before suffering the same fate. They possibly followed another trend - of decline over several generations before a return to the forefront of affairs under the final Sir Thomas. As Habakkuk suggests, personal character plays a large part in the fortunes of families. There are those driven by "... a tradition of thrust and ambition" while others are content with "... modest acquiescence".<sup>66</sup> The final triumph of Sir Thomas' grandchildren, however, seems to have come about as much by chance as from any scheming on the part of the family themselves.

Grene family success came about from a combination of factors, perhaps beginning with the legal career of Sir Henry Grene II, Chief Justice. Loyal service to Edward III and Richard II brought its rewards but also its dangers as Sir Henry Grene III was executed during the power struggles which resulted in the foundation of the Lancastrian dynasty. Later generations learnt from this and maintained a stance which allowed them to accommodate to the various upheavals of the fifteenth century. They managed to accumulate exceptional wealth for their social status but it is difficult to narrow down any one specific reason for this. Marriage was clearly a very significant factor with the senior line

<sup>65</sup> For details of the Parr family see below pp. 149-156.

<sup>66</sup> Finch, p. xii.



in particular being willing to look far afield in the pursuit of suitable brides but towards the end of the line, enclosure, and with it the probability of sheep farming, no doubt added to the family wealth.

Their policy of non-involvement in the Wars of the Roses certainly enabled them to survive this period but possibly slowed down any advancement. While they undoubtedly remained an important family on the local scene, they did not make the political progress of some of their associates such as the Catesbys. Their one big step forward in terms of social mobility, the marriage of Constance to John Stafford, was entirely due to the financial ambitions of the Duke of Buckingham.

## 2. THE MORDAUNT FAMILY

The Mordaunts were a very old established family based at Turvey, Bedfordshire. The nickname 'le Mordaunt' suggested to G.H.Fowler that an early member of the family was guilty of the habit of biting, literally or figuratively.<sup>1</sup> The early Tudor Mordaunts certainly lived up to the family name in pursuing their own ends. The Mordaunt connection with the neighbourhood of Turvey seems to go back as early as 1147 but their claims to Turvey manor stem from 1232. The manor came under the overlordship of Gloucester and the Mordaunts probably acquired it through the marriage of Eustace Mordaunt to Alice, the sister and co-heir of Hugh de Alneto in the early thirteenth century. There is certainly evidence of the de Alnetos holding Turvey in 1278-9<sup>2</sup> and their name is mentioned several times in the cartulary of St Neots as benefactors of the priory.<sup>3</sup> The Mordaunts themselves held positions of importance in Bedfordshire from at least the early years of the fourteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

In order to establish an ancient and respectable lineage, an account of the family history was created in the sixteenth century. '*Succinct Genealogies*' was

<sup>1</sup> G.H. Fowler, *Early Records of Turvey and its Neighbourhood*, Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, vol. xi (Bedford, 1927), p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Hundred Rolls Beds* ii, p. 332.

<sup>3</sup> *VCH Beds.* 3, p. 110.

<sup>4</sup> Katherine Naughton shows William Mordaunt as Coroner in 1316 and Robert Mordaunt as a Knight of the Shire in 1341 - *The Gentry of Bedfordshire in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, Leicester University Department of English Local History, Occasional Paper 3rd series, no. 2 (1976).

written under the pseudonym of Robert Halstead but the author was probably Henry Mordaunt, the second Earl of Peterborough. It has been accepted since then as a fairly accurate account by most historians except Dr. Round, who was suspicious of some of the early charters quoted.<sup>5</sup> In 1927 Fowler showed that Dr. Round was right in his doubts by demonstrating apparently deliberate inaccuracies between the charters given in Halstead and the actual charters preserved in the Stopford Sackville collection. This throws some doubt on all of the Halstead claims except where supported by surviving evidence but, apart from the absence in the Stopford Sackville collection of the various items of royal correspondence quoted by Halstead, transcripts given of later documents do seem to be accurate reproductions.

With a few hiccups along the way the Mordaunts were a success story over a long period of time. As Halstead writes "...by the Prudent Conduct of their Affairs, and successful undertakings, they have ever flourished in an eminent degree of Riches and opulency".<sup>6</sup> According to Halstead they had one problem period in the earlier part of the fifteenth century when Robert Mordaunt managed to impoverish the family estate by alienating many manors. As Halstead was trying to cast a favourable light on all of the family he excused this on the grounds of expenses of war. He suggests that Robert was a supporter of the House of York "during the Civil Broils of his own Country". This explanation is accepted without comment by the Bedfordshire *Victoria County History*<sup>7</sup> but as Robert died in 1448, before the Wars of the Roses began, it is not clear what civil wars were being referred to. It is possible that Robert was associated with Richard, Duke of York, in the power struggle that preceded civil war. On this, and other issues, Halstead's knowledge of history seems to have been a little hazy but, for whatever reason, Robert did indeed dispose of several manors which is

<sup>5</sup> Fowler, *Early Records*, p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> Halstead, p. 389.

<sup>7</sup> *VCH Beds.* 3, p. 110.

an indication of economic problems.

Robert was succeeded by his son William<sup>8</sup> who, Halstead suggests, restored the family fortunes by frugal living. He also ensured the future success of the family by the way he brought up his son John "...a youth of particular Ingenuity, such as did promise both Spirit and Capacity".<sup>9</sup> Once again Halstead's questionable historical knowledge shows as he suggests that William recognised the value of education and after John had received

what the Method and Discipline of a Free-school could give, sent him to learn the Knowledge of the Laws, and to be instructed in those ways that might enable him for the most useful and publick Callings.<sup>10</sup>

The idea of a 'Free School' for someone of John Mordaunt's social position seems unlikely in the middle of the fifteenth century but Robert rightly recognised that a career in the law was the key to advancement for the person concerned and an asset to the family as a whole.

John Mordaunt I succeeded his father in 1481 and soon became very influential in local affairs. In 1485 he was elected to Parliament and in 1487 was chosen as Speaker of the House of Commons, for which service he was given £100 by the King.<sup>11</sup> The Wars of the Roses gave him the chance to also prove himself in military service. At first he clearly followed the family Yorkist tradition but seems to have made several timely switches of allegiance. He became an officer in Warwick's rebellion as well as acting as a counsellor to Richard Neville himself. He was wounded at the Battle of Barnet where the Earl was killed. In spite of this John Mordaunt does not seem to have suffered during the remaining years of Yorkist rule and Halstead copies undated letters to John from Richard III. One, addressed to John Mordaunt, William Salisbury and others, summons them against the Scottish rebels "ye dispose you to Serve Us personally in Our

<sup>8</sup> For Family Tree see Appendix 2b, p. 274.

<sup>9</sup> Halstead, p. 398.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Wedgewood, pp. 607-08.

Said Voyage, accompanied and apparelled for the War according to your degree". Another asks John to bring men to Leicester to help quell the southern rebels.<sup>12</sup> At some stage John must either have changed sides yet again or been forgiven by Henry VII for his involvement with Richard III as he was later one of the commanders at the Battle of Stoke 20th June 1487, apparently on the victorious side.<sup>13</sup>

John was certainly shown royal favour in 1490 when Henry VII granted him the stewardships, worth £10 a year, of the manors of Olney and Marlow, in Buckinghamshire and Caversham, Oxfordshire, after the death of the Countess of Warwick.<sup>14</sup> In 1497 he was granted the Stewardship of the Gloucester fee by Katerina, Duchess of Bedford, which gave him all the rents and the right to appoint bailiffs etc.<sup>15</sup> Under the patronage of Sir Reginald Bray, he was as distinguished in his legal career as he had been in military service. Henry VII asked him to be a counsellor to his commissioners, Walter Field and Thomas Fowler, and there is a letter from Henry VII to John Mordaunt 'his attorney' pointing out that Richard Empson had found that some people held land by knight's service without admitting it and others had been trying to keep wardships from the Crown. John Mordaunt was asked to take action about these matters.<sup>16</sup> In 1495 he was made a King's Serjeant-at-Law and seems to have been instrumental in arranging a marriage between Henry VII's daughter, Margaret, with the King of Scotland; Halstead claimed that a copy of the treaty still existed in John's handwriting.<sup>17</sup>

For many years he was a Privy Councillor which demonstrated continuing royal favour and opened up the opportunity for further advancement such as

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<sup>12</sup> Halstead, pp. 494-95.

<sup>13</sup> *DNB*.

<sup>14</sup> *NRO*, SS 1560.

<sup>15</sup> *NRO*, SS 2372.

<sup>16</sup> Halstead, pp. 495-96; 502-03.

<sup>17</sup> *VCH Beds.* 3, p. 110.

being appointed as Chief Justice of Chester in 1499.<sup>18</sup> He was created a knight on the 18th February 1502/3 and was one of the Knights of the Sword at the creation of Henry as Prince of Wales.<sup>19</sup> On 6th April, 1504, he was appointed High Steward of the University of Cambridge and in June of the same year he finally gained the important post of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.<sup>20</sup> He did not have long to enjoy this position, however, as he died sometime between September and December of that same year.

As well as achieving public office, John was advancing himself and his family fortunes on the local scene. He made a profitable marriage to Edith who was the widow of John Grene of Stotford, Bedfordshire, and the daughter and heiress of Sir Nicholas Latimer of Dorset. Sir Nicholas was a powerful and wealthy man who experienced mixed fortunes in his long life. He had problems with attainders in 1466 and 1484, when his estate was actually granted to John Mordaunt, together with John Wroughton and John Newburgh and their heirs.<sup>21</sup> Nicholas was made a knight banneret in 1461, at the Battle of Tewksbury, and restored to his lands some time during Henry VII's reign. He was pricked as Sheriff of Dorset and Somerset for the second time in 1471; the first occasion had been in 1452. These dates indicate that he was a Lancastrian supporter but even that did not protect him from problems in gaining full control of his estate.

The marriage between John Mordaunt and Edith was advantageous to John, but perhaps Sir Nicholas Latimer also saw value in having an astute lawyer as a son-in-law. Nicholas died in 1505, but problems persisted and, even with John Mordaunt's legal expertise, disputes with the Crown over ownership of the estate continued and it was several years before Richard Elliott, Serjeant-at-

<sup>18</sup> *DNB*.

<sup>19</sup> *Willey Hundred*, p. 177.

<sup>20</sup> *NRO*, SS 2076, 3979. He had been acting in this capacity since the death of Sir Reginald Bray.

<sup>21</sup> *VCH Dorset* 3, p. 707. One of the many favours shown to Mordaunt.

Law pronounced that the King had no claim to the Latimer estate.<sup>22</sup> The marriage also brought John Mordaunt the custody of Edith's daughter, Elizabeth, for whom he received 20 marks from Walter Mervyn who married her to his son John.<sup>23</sup>

The 1480's had seen John Mordaunt making powerful local connections with Yorkist supporters, such as being named as a trustee with Sir John Catesby (Justice of the Kings Bench), William Catesby and John Throgmorton when William Marshall sold[?] land in Turvey.<sup>24</sup> The spread of his activities can be seen in a small way by his appointment as feoffee to people as far apart as Richard Maryot of Buckinghamshire, William Staverton of Northamptonshire, Richard Sheldon of Buckinghamshire and William, Marquess of Barkeley, Yorkshire.<sup>25</sup> By 1502 his successful switch to Lancastrian allegiance was evident when he was linked with Sir Reginald Bray, Sir Thomas Lovell, Richard Empson and Thomas Lucas in granting the keeping of Guines Castle to his neighbour, Sir Nicholas Vaux.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from his professional activities, John was steadily gaining land in Turvey, Stagsden etc. to add to his existing holding. For example the 22 acres he recovered against Edward, Earl of Wiltshire in 1494, and in the same year he acquired a moiety of the manor of Bosoms and Bordeleys from William Vyllers. In 1496 he bought 300 acres from Richard and Rose Tresham for 100 marks, and from John Tresham he obtained all lands which had belonged to Henry Tresham.<sup>27</sup> He also gained concessions from religious houses. In 1488 he acquired all rights in the river Ouse from the Abbot of the monastery at Lavendon and in 1496 he held 100 acres from the Hospital of St John, Bedford.<sup>28</sup> In 1504 he

<sup>22</sup> NRO, SS 3377. The date suggested for this document is *circa* 1540 but this seems rather late.

<sup>23</sup> NRO, SS 2591.

<sup>24</sup> NRO, SS 1914, 3377.

<sup>25</sup> *IPM* Henry VII, vol. I, nos. 724, 922, 1035, 800.

<sup>26</sup> NRO, S 2620.

<sup>27</sup> NRO, SS 2612, 1235, 262, 1231.

<sup>28</sup> NRO, SS 3258, 1078.

was granted indulgences by Cardinal Clement such as permission to have portable altars and to hold services in places under interdict.<sup>29</sup> A clear indication of social status.

John Mordaunt was also very successful in the market for wardships. In the 1490's he petitioned Henry VII for the custody and marriage of John, the son and heir of Thomas Leventhorpe, which he sold in 1503 to his brother-in-law, Wistan Brown of Abbess Rothering in Essex, for £100.<sup>30</sup> In 1497 he purchased from Richard Feteplace the wardship of his son, William, or the next heir if William should die, with the understanding that William would eventually be married to one of John Mordaunt's family.<sup>31</sup> His greatest coup, however, was in the 1490's when he gained custody of the Vere heiresses of Addington which gave him access to all the rents, not only from the estate of Henry Vere and his wife Isobel Tresham, but also of Henry Grene via his daughter Constance and her son Edward Stafford, Earl of Wiltshire.<sup>32</sup> He made an agreement with John Tresham, brother of Isabella, whereby John Tresham was to give Elizabeth a jointure on her marriage of £20 per annum and Anne £10. John Mordaunt was also to have the first option to buy any land that John Tresham sold. John Mordaunt married two of his young sons to these daughters of Henry Vere. John, his heir, to Elizabeth and Robert to Anne. Robert Mordaunt soon died and Anne married Humphrey Brown, son of Sir Wistan Brown and nephew of John Mordaunt, which at least kept the inheritance in the family. These girls were potentially double heiresses; the Vere estates themselves and the Grene estates because their father was the son of Sir Richard Vere, of Thrapston and Addington, and Isobel, one of the two sisters of Henry Grene. Of the other two Vere girls, Constance married Lord Parr of Horton and Audrey married John Brown, a judge who was

<sup>29</sup> NRO, SS 2640.

<sup>30</sup> NRO, SS 171, 2371.

<sup>31</sup> NRO, SS 2599. It is not clear what happened to this proposal as it was in the next generation that a Feteplace married a Mordaunt.

<sup>32</sup> NRO, SS 2103, 2405.



related to Wistan. The other co-heir to the Grene estate was Elizabeth Cheyne, widow of Sir Thomas Cheyne and daughter and heir of Margery, the other sister of Henry Grene, and her husband, Sir Thomas Huddleston. Winning the Grene inheritance for the Vere heiresses was something of a triumph, but although Sir John Mordaunt gained the profits from the estate soon after the death of Edward, Earl of Wiltshire, the will was disputed and the whole affair was not finalised until 1514; fifteen years after the death of Edward and ten years after John's own death. There was more than a hint of sharp practice over the affair, from both Sir John and his son.

Sir John Mordaunt died in 1504 and was succeeded by his son John II. His will named legacies to the churches of Turvey, Mulso and Stagsden and the monasteries of Newnham and Wardon. A splendid tomb was to be erected at Turvey in his memory and he set up a perpetual chantry in the same church. One of the two secular chaplains that were endowed for this purpose was also to teach grammar freely.<sup>33</sup> It is suggested by the *Dictionary of National Biography* that John junior was born about 1490 which would make him only fourteen when his father died but there are no indications of any problems of wardship or minority arising and he was actually one of the witnesses to his father's will.<sup>34</sup> It would seem likely, therefore, that this is an underestimate of his age as by 1505 he was already involved in business dealings in his own right which fits in with Margaret McGregor's suggestion that he was actually twenty one at his father's death.<sup>35</sup>

According to Halstead, young John was "...bred to everything of which an ingenious Nature acould be capable; to Learning, to Arms, to Courtship,

<sup>33</sup> PRO, PCC 22 Holgrave; NRO, SS 3204.

<sup>34</sup> This estimate is probably based on the fact that the executors of John Mordaunt's will were to have the profits from his estate for ten years and his brother, William, was appointed to have control of John's two sons until they reached the age of twenty four.

<sup>35</sup> M. McGregor (ed.), *Bedfordshire Wills Proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury 1353-1548*, Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, vol. 58 (Bedford, 1979), pp. 68-71.

attending much upon Prince Arthur till he died".<sup>36</sup> The evidence shows this opinion to be well founded in at least some areas. John Mordaunt II followed his father's footsteps, both in entering the legal profession and in energetically promoting the family fortunes. He was even more successful on both counts. Less than a year after his father's death he negotiated with his mother and her new husband, Sir John Carr, to replace some of the land that she had been bequeathed with a cash settlement of £40.<sup>37</sup> This enabled him to consolidate his estate which in turn made it more profitable. By 1507 he was already involved in litigation with various people; a trait that was to continue throughout his life. He took action against men who had presented a parson to Mepertisale church, claiming that this right had been granted to the Mordaunt family by Lenton Priory and sold to him by his father in 1503. This was confirmed by the Prior of Lenton.<sup>38</sup>

In the first few years after his father's death John managed to obtain more property and land at Turvey, using his uncle, William Mordaunt, and friend, William Gascoigne, as trustees. These two were clearly trusted associates as they had been executors of his father's will and were involved in many of John's own business dealings. In return, John helped William Gascoigne to obtain a Royal Pardon from Henry VIII in 1509 and two years later William Mordaunt was granted a similar pardon for crimes in the civil wars.<sup>39</sup>

In 1511 John Mordaunt turned his attention to the disputed will of Edward Stafford, Earl of Wiltshire, and got the Master of Rolls to begin an examination.<sup>40</sup> It was still a long drawn out affair that was not resolved until 1515. The depositions taken in 1514 clearly show the direct involvement that Sir John Mordaunt senior had had at the time of the Earl's death. The case was between the relatives of Henry Grene, his two sisters, Margery and Isobel, and the Earl of

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<sup>36</sup> NRO, SS 399.

<sup>37</sup> NRO, SS 1309.

<sup>38</sup> NRO, SS 401.

<sup>39</sup> NRO, SS 2518, 917.

<sup>40</sup> NRO, SS 2642.

Shrewsbury who was one of the most powerful noblemen at that time. The will of Edward Stafford was very specific over some bequests but vague about the main part of the estate - merely saying that the last wills of his father, his mother and his grandfather Grene should be fulfilled. Henry Grene's will left his estate to his daughter Constance and her husband, John Stafford, and the heirs of the body of Constance followed by reversion to "...the ryght heyres of me the said Henry Grene".<sup>41</sup> Similarly John Stafford left everything to his son and heir, Edward, and the heirs of his body, and for want of such issue it should go to his nephew, Thomas Talbot, and his heirs.<sup>42</sup> It would seem that the Earl of Shrewsbury had a good case, except possibly for the ancestral lands of the Grenes, as the descendants of Margery and Isobel were the 'right heirs' of Henry Grene under the existing law. Support for the Earl of Shrewsbury was strengthened because the actual validity of Edward Stafford's will was disputed. It was claimed that he had declared on many occasions that he wanted his estate to go to his cousin, the Earl of Shrewsbury, and specifically not to the Veres.

Fourteen years after Edward Stafford's death, depositions were taken for both sides from those parties that were still alive. Robert Marbury, his Gentleman Usher of the Chamber for twenty five years, recalled how he cautioned the Earl "...put not your soule in charge yn givynge y(our) lands fr(om) y(our) heyres" to which the Earl always replied "I may as well geve thes lands wher I wyll as i may geve the gowne off my bak. For as for the heyres off Veer shall nev(er) inheret them".<sup>43</sup> Similar stories were told by other long standing servants; William Pemberton, Groom, who "...sometimes lay in bed with the Earl over 20 years and more";<sup>44</sup> Henry Paine, Groom and Yeoman of the Chamber for fourteen years; William Boyes, Yeoman Usher of the Hall and Keeper of the park at Drayton for twenty years; and Christopher Middleton, Groom of the Stirrup, who all told of an

<sup>41</sup> NRO, SS 3219.

<sup>42</sup> NRO, SS 3747. The Talbots were the Earls of Shrewsbury.

<sup>43</sup> NRO, SS 2642.

<sup>44</sup> Not an indication of homosexuality, merely an expression of friendship and hospitality.

encounter with Thomas Montagu about a week after the Earl's funeral. Montagu said that although he was one of the feoffees and executors of the estate he had not been called to a meeting in the tower with John Mordaunt, Thomas Cheyne (at that time the husband of another of the Grene heiresses), William Marbury and others. He had not suspected that they were going to change the will, but he did know that it was the Earl's intention that his cousin should be his heir.<sup>45</sup>

The opposing deponents gave a conflicting picture of the death bed scene. On John Mordaunt's side was Thomas Cade, parson of Buckworth and house priest to the Earl, who describes how in his presence the will was engrossed on parchment by Philip Foster and delivered into the hands of William Marbury, one of the executors. There follows a long description of the last rites and mass when the Earl wanted the window open for fresh air which caused problems because of the wind. James Walbyss recalls John Mordaunt asking the Earl if his last will should stand, whereupon Edward renounced all other wills and added extra bequests to Philip Foster and Edward Cruett, Groom of his Chamber. Walbyss continues with details of how the will was sealed with a gold signet which was taken from a pouch under the bed.<sup>46</sup> Both Cade and Walbyss seem to think that if they recall sufficient detail of minor events, then the accuracy of the main issue will be beyond doubt.

These accounts are in sharp contrast to that of Robert Marbury who says that on the evening before the Earl's death he had asked the Earl if his will had been written and the answer was not as yet but that he would do so. At 7am the following morning John Mordaunt came to see how the Earl was, Edward replied that he was well and John Mordaunt went away. He returned about 10am, by which time the Earl had taken a sudden turn for the worse, and Mordaunt had with him a will made in the name of the Earl which he proceeded to read out. The Earl was by then, according to Robert, "...in extreme paynes of death that the said

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<sup>45</sup> NRO, SS 2642.

<sup>46</sup> NRO, SS 2641.

earl neither heard nor understood...and after the reading the earl was dead".<sup>47</sup>

Whatever the truth of the situation, in 1515 the royal justices, Robert Brudnell and Richard Elliott, gave their decision in favour of the Vere heiresses as they found it proven that the estates were entailed.<sup>48</sup> George, Earl of Shrewsbury received 200 marks in compensation and endorsed the judgment by releasing all rights in Drayton and other lands of Constance Grene.<sup>49</sup> By this time Elizabeth Cheyne had died without issue in April of 1502, and similarly Constance Parr in August of the same year. Their husbands received nothing from the estate. Anne Brown had also died but she left a son, George, who received a third of the estate. John Mordaunt and his wife Elizabeth had a third and John Brown and his wife Audrey the final third.

The judgment against the Earl of Shrewsbury is interesting for showing that in spite of the power wielded by the Earl and the strong evidence on his side, the force of the law was weighted towards protecting 'heirs of the body' in their claims to ancestral lands. At the same time John Mordaunt II was not without influence himself; like his father he moved in elite circles at both local and national level. In his youth he had attended upon Prince Arthur and he went on to become a courtier of Henry VIII.<sup>50</sup> Local office came in 1509 when he was appointed Sheriff of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire.<sup>51</sup> From an early stage he was involved in military service, as shown in letters to him from Henry VIII asking him to be ready for war, and his local importance is indicated by another letter from the King which reassured him about the London riots and asked him to pass this on to his fellow countrymen.<sup>52</sup> Other royal services were requested such as accompanying the Queen of Scotland on part of her journeys to and

<sup>47</sup> NRO, SS 242.

<sup>48</sup> NRO, SS 2621.

<sup>49</sup> NRO, SS 4138, 3962.

<sup>50</sup> H. Miller, *Henry VIII and the English Nobility* (Oxford, 1986), p.25.

<sup>51</sup> NRO, SS 3937.

<sup>52</sup> Halstead, p. 527.

from London. On one occasion he was asked to meet her at Stony Stratford and take her to St. Albans and then he had to take her from Windsor castle back to St. Albans.<sup>53</sup>

Royal favour was extended and even more personal service was requested which brought John into contact with the King himself. He was invited to court to meet the French ambassador and later asked to form part of the King's retinue on a trip to Calais to meet the French King.<sup>54</sup> His service was rewarded when he was knighted in 1520. His attendance on the King continued and he was at the meeting of Henry VIII and Charles V at Gravelines and accompanied Henry to the Field of the Cloth of Gold.<sup>55</sup> During the 1530's he was shown favour in other ways by being invited to several royal occasions. On 31st May 1533 he received Anne Boleyn at the Tower when she came to be crowned and his son John was knighted at the coronation,<sup>56</sup> but like his father before him, he adjusted to changing circumstances and three years later he took part in her trial.<sup>57</sup> In 1537 he carried the banner at Jane Seymour's funeral and on 24th November, 1539, he was informed in a letter from Henry VIII that he had been appointed to attend the reception for Anne of Cleves with twenty of his servants.<sup>58</sup>

Other royal positions followed; as a King's counsellor he was directed by Cardinal Wolsey to see that Roger Ratcliff was able to take up his position as Keeper of Birdsnest Park, Overseer of Leicester Forest and Steward of the Honour of Leicester.<sup>59</sup> In the same capacity he was to deliver 500 deer from Leicester Forest to the Marquis of Dorset and another 300 to Lord Hastings. Later he was addressed as Master and Surveyor of woods with instructions from Henry VIII himself telling him to fell trees as he thought necessary, particularly with

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 532-33.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 533, 536-37.

<sup>55</sup> *DNB*.

<sup>56</sup> Halstead, p. 553.

<sup>57</sup> *VCH Beds.* 3, p. 111.

<sup>58</sup> Miller, *Henry VIII*, p. 98; Halstead, p. 568.

<sup>59</sup> Halstead, p. 539.

regard to making a paling to enclose a paddock in Humsdone Park.<sup>60</sup> Similarly wood was required in the New Forest as a lodge there needed to be repaired.<sup>61</sup> He was also appointed to several commissions; for providing for the fortifications of Calais and other ports and castles<sup>62</sup> and one, rather vaguely, for the "...remedy of enormytes".<sup>63</sup> By 1532 he had shifted ground again as he helped to conduct the enquiry into the extent of Wolsey's property and he had become a personal friend of Thomas Cromwell.<sup>64</sup>

As a result of all of his efforts he was summoned to Parliament on 4th May, 1532, as Baron Mordaunt where he joined Edward, Lord Bray, as one of two resident Bedfordshire peers.<sup>65</sup> The next year his courage and loyalty were put to the test when he was appointed as one of the noblemen appointed to try Lord Dacre for treason. Although he was the most junior baron present he was the first to be asked for his verdict. He replied not guilty and his example was followed by all the others.<sup>66</sup> His proximity to London was probably the main reason that he was called for five out of the six times that the Court of the High Steward met to try eight noblemen and one woman, Anne Boleyn. Another probable reason was that his loyalty to the King could be counted upon.

In spite of his own commitment to Roman Catholicism, he supported the Reformation and was present on 16th May, 1532, when the clergy made their submission to the King.<sup>67</sup> His opinion was sought by Henry VIII on the issue of the conformity of Sir Michael Fisher (Mordaunt's son-in-law), whose niece and heir, mistress Rich, wanted to marry Sir Humphrey Ratcliffe, son of the Earl of Sussex.<sup>68</sup> This was, perhaps, a test of his own allegiance and he did not entirely

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<sup>60</sup> Halstead, pp. 548-49

<sup>61</sup> Halstead, p. 551.

<sup>62</sup> Bridges ii, p. 250.

<sup>63</sup> NRO, SS 2562.

<sup>64</sup> *DNB*.

<sup>65</sup> *LP* v, g. 909 (9).

<sup>66</sup> Miller, *Henry VIII*, p. 55.

<sup>67</sup> *DNB*.

<sup>68</sup> Halstead, p. 568.

escape unscathed in the atmosphere of accusation and suspicion that prevailed at the Court during this time. He came briefly under investigation in 1528 after he had made his Lenten confession to Friar Forrest, just before the latter's arrest and execution. He denied having a conversation about the religious situation, however, and no further action was taken against him.<sup>69</sup> He was soon summoned to take part in the trial of the Catholic peers Henry Pole, Lord Montagu, and Henry Courtenay, the Marquess of Exeter. They were not so lucky as Mordaunt as both were condemned and executed.

His continuing local importance is indicated by a letter from Queen Anne announcing the arrival of her daughter which provides evidence of how the locality got information about national events.<sup>70</sup> The expectation of military service also continued as a letter from Henry VIII warned him to be on the lookout for conspirators and be ready to take to the field with his men at a day's notice.<sup>71</sup> As he got older, however, this expectation was waived and he was one of only four noblemen not called on in 1536, but he was asked to provide men, and in 1544 he was one of the few to stay in England when a large expeditionary force left for France. He was excused on grounds of age.

In spite of his active involvement in the Privy Council, in trials and other clear signs of royal favour, Lord Mordaunt does not seem to have reaped the more direct rewards that he might have expected. This was not for want of trying - in 1528 he sent Cardinal Wolsey 500 marks for his college at Oxford and offered to give the King £100 for the office of Under Treasurer. It is clear that he had in the past enjoyed Wolsey's patronage as he several times thanks him for past favours and for being his 'good lord'.<sup>72</sup> In spite of stressing that he had 'redie money', this time he was unsuccessful. Perhaps he was outbid in this almost

<sup>69</sup> Miller, *Henry VIII*, p. 45; *LP* xiii (1), 880, 1043 (2).

<sup>70</sup> Halstead, p. 557.

<sup>71</sup> Halstead, p. 559.

<sup>72</sup> BM, Cotton MS Titus, B1, f 326.



open sale of offices.<sup>73</sup> It would seem that he was bitter about his lack of success in obtaining official offices or other favours as he remarked to Cromwell in 1539, in another unsuccessful bid where he was asking permission to buy a house in London which had belonged to Charterhouse, "I have no office or fee of the kynges grace, nor his grace never gave me nothyng".<sup>74</sup> Failure was hard to bear, and difficult to understand as noblemen created by Henry VIII himself usually did receive at least one grant of land or local office.

As tangible results of royal favour were not forthcoming, it was as well for his family and heirs that he was more successful on his own behalf. Throughout his life he accumulated property and land in the area of his ancient estate of Turvey, Bedfordshire, and near to Drayton in Northamptonshire, which he had obtained via the Grene inheritance. Deeds recording purchases through various legal channels are too numerous to mention but cover a wide spectrum in extent and value. Amounts ranged from 20 shillings for a cottage etc. at Thrapston, bought from Richard Eston, in 1518, to £817. 16s. 4d. paid to Thomas Rayne in 1533 for a large estate at Sudburgh etc.<sup>75</sup> He had many dealings with the Rayne family and his payments for purchases seem to have spread out over a number of years. The purchase of one of the other thirds of the Vere inheritance from George Brown and his father, Humphrey (widower of Anne Vere), cost him the large sum of £968. 26s. 6d.<sup>76</sup>

It is suggested by the *Dictionary of National Biography* that Lord Mordaunt also found ways of enriching himself from the Reformation, but if so he was not very successful. One abortive attempt was reported to Lord Cromwell in a letter from Richard Layton (visitor of religious houses) in 1538/9. The letter describes the condition of the priories of Harwold and Chicksands and irregularities in

<sup>73</sup> Apparently not totally open as Mordaunt closes the letter with a request that Wolsey should burn the same; a request obviously not complied with.

<sup>74</sup> Miller, *Henry VIII*, p. 203; PRO, SP1/150, f191; LP xiv (1), 845.

<sup>75</sup> NRO, SS 1170, 1043.

<sup>76</sup> NRO, SS 4143.

these establishments. It goes on to describe how Lord Mordaunt and his son John had persuaded the young nuns of Harwold to break open their coffer where the convent seal was kept and then asked them to put a seal to a Latin text. The Prioress did not understand the nature of the document but was assured that it was innocuous - presumably it would have given Lord Mordaunt rights in the priory if he been successful.<sup>77</sup> He did receive some land from various religious houses but all of it seems to have been purchased legally on his own behalf. In 1528 he had land in Turvey and Stagsden from the Abbey of St James and in 1537 land from Lavendon Abbey.<sup>78</sup> A more dubious transaction, in 1542, concerned the manor of Stagsden and the former Prior of Newnham where it has been suggested that the Letter Patent in the Stopford Sackville collection could be a forgery.<sup>79</sup> In another questionable case an *Inquisition Post Mortem*, taken in 1602, shows that in 1536 the Prior and monks of St Neots had conveyed to Lord Mordaunt their manor and land in Turvey, but here again the *Victoria County History* suggests that there might have been some irregularity with this evidence.<sup>80</sup>

John Mordaunt probably also added to his wealth by becoming involved in the lucrative pastime of sheep farming on his extensive estates. He certainly was responsible for enclosing large areas of land around Drayton in 1534 and converting arable and ley ground into pasture. A complaint regarding these actions was made by the local people in 1550. A typical grievance was that some of the land "...hath been comon at all tymes of the yere to all the inhabitants of Luffwicke owte of mynde. And more the freholders and other pore inhabytants of the said towne of Luffwick be debarred of their comon theron".<sup>81</sup>

John had a large family to provide for with four sons and six daughters.

<sup>77</sup> Cotton MSS Cleopatra E iv, f 161. Lord Mordaunt's confession to Father Forrest.

<sup>78</sup> NRO, SS 269. 271.

<sup>79</sup> VCH Beds. 3, p. 113; NRO, SS 3496.

<sup>80</sup> VCH, *ibid*.

<sup>81</sup> NRO, SS 2626. The document describing these events is too damaged to accurately estimate the amount of land involved.

His daughters made solid if unspectacular marriages to respected and substantial, rather than titled, families. Apart from his eldest daughter, Anne, who married John Fisher of Bedfordshire, the marriages were all outside his main bases of Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire. Some were in neighbouring counties such as Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire but Margaret married Edmund Feteplace of Berkshire and Elizabeth married Sylvester Danvers of Wiltshire. Perhaps financial considerations were of more importance in John Mordaunt's choice of sons-in-law. He had to pay dowries ranging from 450 marks to John More, Robert Cheyne and Dame Anne Danvers to 600 marks to John Feteplace and Michael Fisher but the estates settled on the young couples were quite substantial. For example Robert Cheyne made a jointure of land worth £20 to his son and Winifred Mordaunt but he also committed himself to leave an estate worth £220 and entail it to the heirs of the said couple.<sup>82</sup> A letter, probably written in the 1540's (possibly to Robert Cheyne) reveals that marriages were part of wider business dealings. Lord Mordaunt writes -

I do p(er)ceive by my son Sir John Mordaunt knight that you have half a dispain in me whether I mean to go through with you in the marriage of your son to my daughter, or whether I do it for delay to the intent that you should owe me favour for payment of the king's money.

He goes on to deny the accusation and blames the delay on his own ill health.<sup>83</sup> He clearly took a keen personal interest in these marriage settlements as notes and corrections have been added to the documents in his own handwriting. All of the contracts were very detailed and covered eventualities such as premature death of one of the parties and, with his shrewd business acumen, they allowed him to pay his daughters' dowries over a period of years.<sup>84</sup>

It is somewhat surprising that the Mordaunts did not make more marriage alliances with established local gentry at a time when these families showed a

<sup>82</sup> NRO, SS 2628.

<sup>83</sup> NRO, SS 228.

<sup>84</sup> NRO, SS 2628, 2633, 3378, 3380, 3383, 3384, 3385.

considerable degree of intermarriage. Perhaps his willingness to take part in Henry VIII's dubious treason trials upset his largely Roman Catholic neighbours. On the other hand, perhaps Lord Mordaunt's own temperament was the problem as throughout his life he showed a partiality for disputes and litigation, most of which he won! Some have already been described but others include an action in 1528 with Sir Thomas Tresham over which land had come to the Vere family via Isobel Tresham (Lord Mordaunt's mother-in-law)<sup>85</sup> and he had trouble more than once with Brigstock. In 1528 he sought the support of Sir Edward Montagu in the case, pleading for justice for his tenants of Sudburgh in their disagreement with Brigstock over common rights, and in 1550 he disputed with Lord Parr over contested rights between Brigstock and Drayton Park.<sup>86</sup> In 1540 he even pursued his own mother regarding non payment of her tithes.<sup>87</sup>

If the marriages set up for his daughters were unspectacular in terms of social prestige, Lord Mordaunt achieved more success for his eldest son, John Mordaunt III, who he managed to marry to Ellen Fitzlewis, daughter of Sir Richard Fitzlewis of Thornton, Essex. Here his Court position seems to have been some help to him as according to Halstead the marriage was purchased from the King at an 'easie rate',<sup>88</sup> but in a letter to Wolsey, Mordaunt complains of his great charges.<sup>89</sup> On the death of her brother, Ellen became the sole heiress of the considerable Fitzlewis estate. Mordaunt's other sons were more modestly provided for, but at least two of them married heiresses. George married Cicely, daughter of Nicholas Harding of Northill, Bedfordshire<sup>90</sup> and William married Agnes Booth of Durham.<sup>91</sup> There is no record of a marriage for Edmund, but in

<sup>85</sup> NRO, SS 3348.

<sup>86</sup> NRO, various documents, particularly SS 225, 3241.

<sup>87</sup> NRO, SS 220.

<sup>88</sup> Halstead, p. 401.

<sup>89</sup> BM, Cotton MS Titus, B1, f 326.

<sup>90</sup> *Visitations of Bedfordshire*, pp. 42, 125.

<sup>91</sup> NRO, SS 3385.

1548 his father set him up with half the manor of Loxton etc.<sup>92</sup>

In the later years of his life Lord Mordaunt seems to have fallen from favour and retired to his house of Drayton. Halstead suggests that he grew tired of the religious persecutions "...he was not able to shew that compliance which others of more supple tempers did condescend to do".<sup>93</sup> This was patently not true of him in his younger days but the family did remain Roman Catholics. One reason for him adopting a lower profile could have been disappointment at his lack of success in gaining tangible rewards from the King for his service, or it could simply have been ill health and old age. The last theory does have some evidence to support it as letters written by Lord Mordaunt to various people in the 1540's mention his health and lack of ability to travel.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, the idea of a fall from favour is given credence by the fact that in 1541/2 Henry VIII began to try to get Drayton House away from him. Lord Mordaunt wrote a long letter to the Earl of Southampton asking him to intercede on his behalf. He wanted the Earl to convince the King that Drayton was "...no mete howse" and to point out to Henry that he already had houses nearer to Rockingham Forest and that other men had pleasant houses "...better watered than Drayton is and also more near to the forest by three or four miles than Drayton is".<sup>95</sup> He movingly describes how he has spent £1,000 on the house which he has lived in for forty years and which was part of his wife's inheritance and warns that "...she might come into a frenze which greaveth me most" if she should lose the house. On his own part he thinks that "...if I shall now depart from my said howse of Drayton I suppose no les but that it will put me in great danger of life". Halstead (always looking for a favourable interpretation) tries to suggest that John's reluctance was because the King wanted to exchange Drayton for newly acquired abbey lands "...with which his conscience, as well as his Interest, were altogether

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<sup>92</sup> NRO, SS 999.

<sup>93</sup> Halstead, p. 400.

<sup>94</sup> NRO, SS 228.

<sup>95</sup> NRO, SS 229.

incompatible" but there is no hard evidence for this suggestion.<sup>96</sup> John does not just rely on eloquence to convince the Earl of Southampton to act on his behalf, but offers him £40 to buy a doublet. Fortunately for Lord Mordaunt, Henry VIII died before he could accomplish the possession of Drayton.

Even with ill health and in old age Lord Mordaunt was still "...entire Master of the great inheritance".<sup>97</sup> In 1546 he was offering Anthony Grome £20 for conducting unspecified business on his behalf and in 1558, in spite of "pain and sickness", he was able to write a long letter to Sir William Essex about mutual debts.<sup>98</sup> In 1550 he made it very clear to his own son that he was still the head of the family over a dispute concerning the marriage of his grandson Lewis. John wanted his son Lewis to marry the daughter of his second wife, but Lewis realised that he needed his grandfather's approval. Lord Mordaunt quite decisively did not approve; he thought Lewis could do better. He took Lewis "...unto his own house and custody" and when John threatened to cut himself off from his son, Lord Mordaunt countered with threats to withhold any benefit of the Fitzlewis inheritance that had come to the family on John's own first marriage.<sup>99</sup>

After another flurry of property dealing in the 1550's, mainly the acquisition of land in Aldwinkle and Grafton, Lord Mordaunt finally died in 1562. In his lifetime he had followed his father's example and greatly expanded the family lands both through marriage and by purchase, in spite of benefiting little from the dispersal of monastic lands at the Reformation or from royal grants. In his later years he almost fell foul at last of political intrigue and backed the wrong side. In 1553 he is found writing to Queen Mary profusely apologising for having been hasty in proclaiming the title of Lady Jane Grey. Perhaps he was forgiven because his son John had been enthusiastic and active on Mary's behalf. The fact that he was, indeed, forgiven is evident from his inclusion as one of the

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<sup>96</sup> Halstead, p. 400.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 401.

<sup>98</sup> NRO, SS 226, 224.

<sup>99</sup> NRO, SS 2630.

Commissioners of the Peace in 1554 for Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire and Northamptonshire. His son, Edmund, was named for Bedfordshire and Essex and Sir John was also one of the quorum for Essex, probably because the Mordaunts had acquired land there via Ellen Fitzlewis, wife of John Mordaunt III.

Sir John Mordaunt III was well established by the time of his father's death. He had been knighted in 1533 at the coronation of Anne Boleyn, the honour possibly conferred through his father's influence though he had also been well known himself as a youth in Court circles. On his own behalf he seems to have made little impact on the family fortunes as his marriage to Ellen Fitzlewis was once again down to his father and it was his son Lewis who really benefited from it. Lord Mordaunt's will directs John to deliver to Lewis within the year part of his inheritance to the value of 300 marks. John could have the income from the rest for ten years and then it all went to Lewis.<sup>100</sup>

There are a few records of Sir John making relatively small purchases such as a cottage in Lowick in 1554.<sup>101</sup> Halstead suggests that because of his father's "...addiction to the Old Religion", Sir John also had to retire to the country which might have deprived him of opportunity.<sup>102</sup> Other writers seem to think that it was John himself who was the ardent catholic. Certainly he was one of the first to declare for Queen Mary, putting himself into the field at the head of the Essex men. Even when Lady Jane Grey was meeting with the council in the Tower of London it was noted by *Stow Chronicle* that John Mordaunt was one of those with the Lady Mary at Kenninghall castle, Norfolk.<sup>103</sup> He was soon appointed to her Privy Council.<sup>104</sup> Halstead suggests that he was held in such high favour by Mary to the extent that "...there was no advancement he might not expected

<sup>100</sup> Halstead, p. 593; PRO, PCC 22 Streat.

<sup>101</sup> NRO, eg. SS 442.

<sup>102</sup> Halstead, p. 401.

<sup>103</sup> Halstead, p. 599.

<sup>104</sup> Acts of the Privy Council 1552-54. Many references to him attending Council meetings.

under her Countenance and Government".<sup>105</sup> Certainly throughout her reign he is found fulfilling a variety of public roles. In Essex in 1553 he was on a Commission of Sewers and following year on a Commission of *Oyer* and *Terminer*.<sup>106</sup> In 1556 and 1557 he was one of the justices in treason trials and in 1557 he was appointed to a commission to enquire into heresies and seditious books etc.<sup>107</sup>

After the death of his first wife, in 1547, John married Joane Wilford who was a widow and the daughter of Richard Fermor of Easton Neston; successful newcomers on the Northamptonshire scene and also ardent Catholics. She had attended Queen Mary as a princess and was also held in high regard. Joane had a daughter from her first marriage who she wanted to marry to her stepson, Lewis Mordaunt, but was thwarted in this ambition by Lord Mordaunt as already described. Sir John and his father settled their differences with "...mutual fears of general ruin".<sup>108</sup>

Lewis eventually made a much more socially acceptable marriage with Elizabeth, the daughter of Sir Arthur Darcy, by whom he had a son Henry and three daughters. He became "...an Idol of the Province where he lived.....his hospitality is to this day famous".<sup>109</sup> This marriage was set up by Lord Mordaunt and Sir Arthur's son, Henry Darcy. Henry made sure that the young couple were well provided for. Lord Mordaunt had to make a jointure to the bride of 100 marks worth of land immediately with 100 marks more after his death. He also had to agree to leave Lewis 800 marks a year and a £1,000 pounds a year more after the death of his father. Lord Mordaunt was to bear all the costs of the wedding, including the clothes of Henry Darcy and his sisters. In return Henry was to pay Lord Mordaunt 1,000 marks and give his sister jewels and the like to the value of

<sup>105</sup> Halstead, p. 639.

<sup>106</sup> *CPR 1553-54*, p. 27.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 125, 405, 281-82.

<sup>108</sup> NRO, SS 2636.

<sup>109</sup> Halstead, p. 402.



200 marks.<sup>110</sup>

Lewis was left a set of guidelines on how to conduct his affairs between himself and his father to his best advantage by someone who describes himself as "...your loving father, Robert Tyrwhyte" and talks about Lewis's wife as his "sweet heart".<sup>111</sup> He warns Lewis to make sure that he gets discharged from paying 900 marks a year to his father and that he gets full powers from his father over his own estate. On the one hand this seems to be suggesting that Mordaunt would take advantage of Lewis if he could but at the same time that he would stick to an agreement as he was of such 'godly religion'. Tyrwhyte reminds Lewis to set up the extra 100 marks jointure on his wife that was promised in the marriage settlement on the death of Lord Mordaunt. As an afterthought he asks Lewis to speak to his brother to use his influence to appoint his 'son Darcy' to the Commission for the Subsidy and suggests that if he is wise Lewis will try to get the same for himself for Bedfordshire.<sup>112</sup> John Mordaunt III died in 1571 and Lewis became the third Lord Mordaunt.

The Mordaunts are a good example of how a substantial, established gentry family could prosper under the early Tudors. A timely switch of family allegiance from York to Lancaster, and the willingness to adapt to political circumstances, set the seal on their success. Ability in the law during these troubled times provided the base from which Sir John and his son, the first Lord Mordaunt, built up the family estates. It gave them access to influential patronage and royal favour. Although the latter was less generous than they might have hoped for they made the most of their opportunities.

Sir John set the pattern of bringing substantial estates to the family through wealthy heiresses when he married the widow of John Grene and heiress of her father, Sir Nicholas Latimer. Two other major strokes of fortune

<sup>110</sup> NRO, SS 2636 (1).

<sup>111</sup> NRO, SS 2636 (2).

<sup>112</sup> A clear hint that being a member of a commission carried advantages.

went their way as a result of speculation in wardships. From the successful (if dubious) legal action undertaken by Sir John and his son, the Vere heiresses brought in another large fortune as did Ellen Fitzlewis on the death of her brother. It is difficult to arrive at any real estimate of the wealth of the Mordaunts over this period as detailed accounts have not survived.

Although the family remained solidly Roman Catholic throughout, Lord Mordaunt was able to subdue his conscience enough to take part in trials of fellow peers. Many years later his grandson followed his example when he was an unwilling judge in the trial of Mary Queen of Scots.

After the success of Sir John and his son, the first Lord Mordaunt, the next two generations were more content to rest on the estate that had been bequeathed to them. Lewis, in fact, managed to spend a large part of his fortune on entertainment and embellishment of Drayton House to the extent that he had to sell off the Latimer and Fitzlewis inheritances.<sup>113</sup> Another family where some generations lacked 'thrust and ambition'.

The Mordaunt survival was no doubt helped by an unbroken line of male heirs stretching from the middle of the thirteenth until the end of the seventeenth centuries - largely untroubled by minorities or wardships. In fact the first significant wardship came with Lewis's grandson, John, and it probably benefited the family as it broke the pattern of Roman Catholicism. John's father, Henry, was suspected of involvement in the Gunpowder Plot, was held in the tower for some time and sentenced to a heavy fine. When he died in 1610 his son was removed from the custody of his Roman Catholic mother by the King's command and placed in the care of George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury. John went on to become a favourite of James I and was created Earl of Peterborough by Charles I.

<sup>113</sup> Stopford-Sackville, *Drayton House*, p. 8.

### 3. THE EMPSON FAMILY

The Empsons were a minor, land owning family from Towcester, who only became significant because of the rise to power of Richard Empson, a lawyer in the reign of Henry VII. For how long the family had been citizens of Towcester is impossible to establish as relevant documents only begin to record their name from the mid-fifteenth century. The first Empson to be mentioned was Richard's father, Peter Empson.

Although the Empsons were not originally in the same league as the Grenes and Mordaunts, not being holders of any manors, neither did they occupy the humble position that history has accorded them. It was John Stow in his *Annals of England*, written around 1600, who told us that Richard Empson was the son of a Towcester sieve maker and that he rose from poverty "... into inestimable authority and riches".<sup>1</sup> This account of the family background was reinforced by Francis Bacon in the *History of the Reign of Henry VII* and has been accepted by historians ever since. Even George Baker in the mid-nineteenth century followed the same line and, in spite of the fact that he discovered that Peter Empson was a man "... of some local consequence", he accepted that this was "... notwithstanding his menial occupation".<sup>2</sup> The assumption was eventually challenged in 1982 by Mark Horowitz who points out

<sup>1</sup> M. Horowitz, 'Richard Empson, Minister of Henry VII', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, Vol. LV, no. 131, (May 1982), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Baker i, p. 139.

that there is no documentary evidence with regard to any occupation or profession for Peter Empson.<sup>3</sup> It is even possible that, like his son, he was involved with the law as his name appears as feoffee or witness to many grants and property conveyances in Towcester and surrounding villages.<sup>4</sup>

What is clear from the evidence is that Peter Empson owned land and property in his own right long before his son began to make a name for himself. He also owned property in the right of his wife, Elizabeth Joseph, who was a co-heiress to neighbouring estates.<sup>5</sup> The Josephs themselves were a family of some note in the Towcester area and Empson was clearly a man of local importance. His position is first indicated by him being named as a juror for the assizes in 1444.<sup>6</sup> In 1448 he is to be found leasing a cottage and three acres in Towcester for the nominal rent of 1d.<sup>7</sup> and other deeds show him as a co-feoffee, as a grantor of land and as an owner of land.<sup>8</sup> After his death, in 1473, his widow, Elizabeth, is found selling six tenements in Towcester which suggests quite substantial property ownership.<sup>9</sup> As another indicator of his position there are many examples of him acting as a witness in property negotiations between individuals and in 1451 he witnessed a grant to Sponne's Charity.<sup>10</sup> These activities reinforce the suggestion that he might have been a lawyer, but there is no documentary evidence of this. Perhaps the clearest indication of his social standing, however, is shown by the marriage of his daughters. Elizabeth married William Spencer of Radbourn, Warwickshire, and their descendants led to the Spencer-Churchill, Duke of Marlborough line; while Anne was the first wife of

<sup>3</sup> Horowitz, 'Richard Empson', pp. 35-49.

<sup>4</sup> Fermor Hesketh collection in the Northampton Record Office.

<sup>5</sup> Horowitz, 'Richard Empson', p. 36; *Luffield Priory Charters* ii, ed. G.R. Elvey (Welwyn Garden City, 1975) p. xxxiv.

<sup>6</sup> *CPR 1485-94*, p. 374.

<sup>7</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/1/3.

<sup>8</sup> NRO, FH MTD/F/19/3; F/20/5; F/17/12.

<sup>9</sup> NRO, FH MTD/F/19/8.

<sup>10</sup> NRO, TC 16.

John Spencer of Hodnell, Warwickshire, whose line led to Althorp.<sup>11</sup>

While we know nothing of Peter Empson's occupation, we know a great deal about the activities of his son, Richard, who was a very successful lawyer. We do not know how or when he received his legal training but he was certainly practising by his father's death.<sup>12</sup> His property dealings on his own behalf seem to begin in 1473 when he purchased a tenement in Towcester.<sup>13</sup> This is three years earlier than the date from which the *Dictionary of National Biography* suggests that he began to acquire property, and it was only the start of numerous transactions towards building up an estate which eventually centred on Easton Neston, a small settlement just outside the old Roman town of Towcester.

One of the quirks of fate which perhaps enabled Richard Empson to rise above the many keen, young lawyers like himself, was where he lived. Towcester, a small town situated astride the A5 in Northamptonshire, may not seem to be a very promising birthplace, but at this crucial period in history several influential men were associated with the area and, as always, success can depend on who you know. Sir William Catesby was an established local landowner, Richard Fowler, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, obtained property in Easton Neston in 1475 as did John Russell, the Lord Privy Seal and Sir Thomas Billing, Chief Justice of the King's Bench. Together with the lesser ranks of MPs, sheriffs and royal commissioners the "...influence many of these men had on the careers of Empson and other men cannot be overstated".<sup>14</sup>

Richard Empson's association with such men is beyond question as evidenced by numerous deeds which link their names and interests. For example in 1475 Richard is named with John Russell, Sir Walter Mauntell and Richard Fowler as receiving the quitclaim of a tenement in Easton Neston from Henry Bacon. Three months later he was associated with John Russell, Sir

<sup>11</sup> For Family Tree see Appendix 2c, p. 275.

<sup>12</sup> Horowitz, 'Richard Empson', p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> NRO, FH MTD/F/19/7; D/6/11

<sup>14</sup> Horowitz, 'Richard Empson', p. 37.

Thomas Billing, Thomas Fowler etc. in a grant of land in Easton Neston by John Eltonhead<sup>15</sup> who had purchased the same from John Bacon. Sir Ralph Hastings and Sir William Catesby were among the witnesses.<sup>16</sup> It would seem that Richard Empson and his colleagues were trustees of the Bacon estate.

In 1475 Richard Empson gained his first official appointment, as a Justice of the Peace for Northamptonshire<sup>17</sup> and in 1477 he bought the first part of what was to become his estate in Easton Neston. He paid Henry Bacon £56. 13s. 4d. for land in Easton Neston, Hulcote, Stoke Bruerne and Shutlanger.<sup>18</sup> An indication, perhaps, that he was not yet a wealthy man is given by the fact that payments were spread out over more than a year until 1478 when his fellow trustees [?], John, Bishop of Rochester and Keeper of the Privy Seal, Sir Thomas Billing, Richard Fowler, and Thomas Fowler, quitclaimed any interest in the estate.<sup>19</sup> In the same year Richard took his first career step forward with his appointment as Attorney General to the Duchy of Lancaster, probably through the influence of these same business acquaintances.<sup>20</sup>

Over the next few years Richard divided his time between affairs of the Duchy and his own local interests. Horowitz shows that he attended all but one of the Duchy council meetings and that he might even have presided over the session on 10th February 1481 in the absence of the Chancellor.<sup>21</sup> He was an active attorney for the Duchy in a variety of ways. In 1480 he petitioned the King's Council to enable him to summon two ring leaders of a riot in Yorkshire and he reported concern that the King was not being paid his dues for rent in Yorkshire and that when an officer of the Duchy had held cattle against payment, eighty men had released them. In 1482 he went to Fotheringhay Castle to search the

<sup>15</sup> MP for Old Sarum 1467-68 and Escheator for Northamptonshire and Rutland.

<sup>16</sup> NRO, FH MTD/E/1/4; E/27/3.

<sup>17</sup> CPR 1467-77, p. 624.

<sup>18</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/17/8.

<sup>19</sup> NRO, FH MTD/E/1/5.

<sup>20</sup> Somerville, p. 406.

<sup>21</sup> Horowitz, 'Richard Empson', p. 37.

Feodary Rolls in order to separate the affairs of the Duchy from those of the Duchy of York.<sup>22</sup> This concern with legal detail was indicative of his future actions under Henry VII.

Meanwhile he maintained his local activities in the Towcester area. In the 1470s he became involved in the affairs of Luffield Priory and was later granted an annuity of 40 shillings by them for acting on their behalf.<sup>23</sup> In 1481 he was elected as a collector for Sponne's charity in Towcester.<sup>24</sup> He continued to add to his own land holding with further parcels of land that had once belonged to Henry Bacon.<sup>25</sup>

When Richard III claimed the throne, Richard Empson suffered a setback in his career. He was immediately replaced as Attorney General of the Duchy of Lancaster by Thomas Keble and demoted to Apprentice-at-Law. This was in contrast to the favour shown by the new King to Richard's associates, William Catesby, Richard Ratcliffe and Francis, Viscount Lovell. In an attempt to explain this situation Horowitz suggests that Richard Empson might have had links with the executed William, Lord Hastings, but can find only circumstantial evidence that the two men knew each other through their mutual acquaintance with Sir William Catesby who was under the patronage of Lord Hastings.<sup>26</sup> A more simple explanation might have been jealousy on the part of William Catesby. Although Richard Empson received little recognition from Richard III, neither does he seem to have come under suspicion of disloyalty as he was included on a commission in Northamptonshire to investigate the support for Buckingham's rebellion and he was one of the members of a Commission of Array to raise recruits to quell the Earl of Richmond's rebellion.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>23</sup> *Luffield Priory Charters* ii, p. xxxiv, no. 766c.

<sup>24</sup> *VCH Northants.* 2, pp. 181-82.

<sup>25</sup> NRO, FH MTD/E/26/10.

<sup>26</sup> Horowitz, 'Richard Empson' p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> *CPR 1476-85*, pp. 393, 492.

During this period out of royal favour Richard gradually built up his estate in Easton Neston and surrounding villages by purchasing small parcels of land from various sources - eg. a messuage and close from Swardsley Priory, an acre of arable and a piece of land called Peetes Croft from Thomas Fowler, two closes and one acre from Richard Middleton and his wife Maude,<sup>28</sup> six acres and a meadow from Thomas Bosenor and two closes from Thomas Grene and his associates who included William Catesby, Robert Throckmorton and Thomas Lovell.<sup>29</sup>

The success of Henry VII at Bosworth Field had a dramatic affect on the Northamptonshire scene; William Catesby was immediately beheaded for treason while three weeks later his erstwhile friend, Richard Empson, was reinstated as Attorney General for the Duchy of Lancaster. His unexplained rejection by Richard III had proved a blessing in disguise and probably saved his life. Horowitz identifies the key to Richard Empson's favour with Henry VII as his acquaintance with Reginald Bray, one of Henry's closest allies.<sup>30</sup> Sir Reginald had considerable estates in Northamptonshire, including Steane House, near to Brackley, and Richard Empson was one of his trustees when he purchased Edgecote in 1492. Richard's opportunities and responsibilities soon grew; probably through a combination of patronage and his own legal skill. He was still prominent on the Northamptonshire scene, however, being awarded the stewardship of two lordships and continuing to be involved with Sponne's Charity. He also continued to derive at least some of his income by acting for local families. For example he was to receive 40 shillings as the supervisor of the will of John Chauncey of Northampton.<sup>31</sup>

Richard was appointed a Justice of the Peace for the county in 1486 and was elected to Parliaments from 1489 to 1504. In 1491 his influence widened

<sup>28</sup> The grandmother of the final Thomas Grene.

<sup>29</sup> NRO, FH MTD/E/28/2; E/2/1; E/28/4; E/28/5.

<sup>30</sup> Horowitz, 'Richard Empson', p. 39.

<sup>31</sup> NRO, Northamptonshire Early Wills no. 334, f201-03.



when he was elected Speaker of the House. In 1490 he became Recorder for Northampton and also for Coventry and royal favour continued with his appointment to every Commission of the Peace in Northamptonshire and other counties that were set up during the reign of Henry VII. He was never, however, appointed as Sheriff for the county; a position which seems to have been reserved for older and more established landed families.

Empson was working towards joining these ranks as hardly a year went by when he did not add to his estate in the county with parcels of land of varying amounts. Perhaps his profession helped him in knowing when land was available or when people were in monetary difficulties. He bought land from Thomas Bosenor, Thomas Fowler, John Claypole and John Shefford, among others, and one transaction with Joan, widow of Stephen Atte Mill, in 1493, specifically mentions that she is badly in need of money and that none of her friends will offer as much as Richard Empson.<sup>32</sup> This transaction does show that Richard, at this stage, was dealing fairly with people and was not trying to take advantage of the situation. Another seller to think well of Richard was John Dyve who sold him the manor of Hulcote for "... divers and many grete dedes by hym" and for 200 marks.<sup>33</sup> Some land he also acquired by exchange in order to consolidate his estate. For example in 1483 he exchanged land with Richard Middleton and his wife Maude in order to add another close to Easton Neston.<sup>34</sup>

At last, in 1499, came the culmination of Richard's efforts and he really joined the ranks of the landed gentry of Northamptonshire. He had accumulated a large enough area of land in one place to be given licence to empark and enclose four hundred acres of land and thirty acres of wood in Easton Neston, Hulcote etc. No-one was to hunt or fish there without his permission on the

<sup>32</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/28/1.

<sup>33</sup> NRO, FH MTD/E/20/2. This deed recites how Richard Woodville, Earl Ryvers, had sold the same under entail to Fulk Hulcote whose descendants had broken the entail in order to sell it to John Dyve.

<sup>34</sup> NRO, FH MTD/E/28/4.

proviso that none of this land was within one of the royal forests. At the same time he was given permission to crenellate Easton Neston Manor which he had bought from Sir Thomas Grene.<sup>35</sup> The establishment of this house and park did not in any way slow down his quest for an ever larger estate, however, which he pursued by buying land from William Gaunte and John Ashby. In 1504 he took a lease on all of the lands of Luffield Priory, at a yearly rental of £45, and the goods belonging to the priory were given into his keeping.<sup>36</sup>

Between 1505 and 1507 Richard and a number of trustees, including his son Thomas, acquired the manor and hundred of Towcester from Richard, Earl of Kent.<sup>37</sup> The Earl had originally promised this property to Sir John Hussey and Edmund Dudley but Sir John was assigned Brampton in Huntingdonshire, Castle Ashby and Wymersley and Hamfordshoe hundreds in recompense and Sir John later assigned some land in Towcester to Dudley.<sup>38</sup> At first Richard Empson paid £55 a year for the Towcester rights, but in 1507 this was reduced to £50 and later that year the Earl quitclaimed the same to Richard Empson for 700 marks.<sup>39</sup> The estate was substantial, consisting of the manor itself and thirty seven messuages, three mills, ninety acres of land, five hundred acres of meadow, a thousand acres of pasture, twelve hundred acres of wood and £35 worth of rents. The proportion of pasture suggests that it was mainly used for rearing sheep or cattle.

Richard's work for the Duchy of Lancaster and his friendship with Reginald Bray put him in a high profile position at Court. He undertook work for that important body 'the Council learned in the law' and he sat in the Court of Requests and Star Chamber. His efforts were eventually rewarded in February 1504 when he was created a Knight of the Bath on the occasion of the future

<sup>35</sup> NRO, FH MTD/U/35/5.

<sup>36</sup> *Luffield Priory Charters*, A9, p. 441, A10, p. 442. In 1496 Luffield had been suppressed and the remaining monks found places in other houses of the order. p. xxxv.

<sup>37</sup> This is one of the few times that Thomas is mentioned in a deed before his father's death.

<sup>38</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/27/3; D/27/1.

<sup>39</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/27/4, 5 and 7.

Henry VIII being created Prince of Wales. When Reginald Bray died, in 1503, Empson might have been a logical successor to the Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster but Henry VII, after a delay of nearly a year, eventually chose to appoint Sir John Mordaunt. Sir John did not live long to enjoy this position as he died in September 1504 and the King once again delayed in filling the post. During this period Richard was the leading councillor and referred to as the 'keeper of the duchy seal'.<sup>40</sup> On 30th October, 1505, his position became official when he was granted the office of Chancellor for life. His personal relationship with the King can be seen from the fact that on at least one occasion Henry VII stayed at Easton Neston, in 1507, but his rewards were fairly modest. Also in 1507 he was granted the stewardship of manors in the county but the King changed the words 'for life' to 'during pleasure'<sup>41</sup>; a typical device of Henry VII to keep his servants loyal.

Richard's work for the Duchy, and for the King in other capacities, might have brought him wealth and honour but they also sowed the seeds of his eventual downfall as he made many powerful enemies. Richard, together with his colleague Edmund Dudley and other councillors, became heavily involved in the pursuance and collection of debts due on bonds - an activity that was bound to be unpopular with those having to pay. Some of the bonds called in were for long forgotten obligations, and ancient laws were brought back into use to prove that people owed money to the Crown. Other bonds were for promises of good behaviour - another device used by Henry VII to control the actions of his subjects. The strain put on people of living with fear and the uncertainty of when obligations would be called in, built up enormous resentment which rebounded against Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley after the death of Henry VII. Empson and Dudley were not unwilling participants in these activities and probably helped the King to introduce more and more ways of raising money.

<sup>40</sup> Horowitz, 'Richard Empson' p. 41.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

Baker describes them as "... eager instruments of royal rapacity".<sup>42</sup>

Horowitz gives a detailed account of both Empson's known activities and also of the accusations made about him for which actual evidence has not been found. Richard's name appears on over fifty recognizances<sup>43</sup> so he was clearly involved in this process.<sup>44</sup> His signature is also on various petitions presented to the King by individuals claiming some relief, but if he was also involved, as Dudley certainly was, in receiving personal payments from these people for presenting their petitions, then the evidence is less accessible than Dudley's own account book. It can only be assumed on the law of probability that Richard was equally guilty of receiving what amounted to bribes, as this was the customary way for those close to Court circles to profit from their position; especially when official rewards were few and far between. Henry VII was particularly sparing of royal favour.

The financial policies pursued by Henry VII and encouraged by his ministers were deeply unpopular, and on his death his son, Henry VIII, was forced to take action to pacify an irate populace. Being unwilling to blame his father, scapegoats had to be found and Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley were the unfortunate victims. Two days after the death of Henry VII, in April 1509, they were arrested and charged with constructive treason. It was alleged that they were involved in armed conspiracy to overthrow the King and seize government; an unlikely charge for which little evidence was produced. Richard was tried at Northampton Castle on October 3rd, 1509, and found guilty by local men, Sir Robert Brudenell and Sir John Fisher, among others. A Bill of Attainder was passed against them in the following January but they remained in the Tower of London until August when Henry VIII (it is suggested reluctantly) finally signed the death warrant. They were beheaded on Tower Hill on 17th August

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<sup>42</sup> Baker ii, p. 140.

<sup>43</sup> i.e. entries in the Close Rolls that record obligations by bond.

<sup>44</sup> Horowitz, 'Richard Empson' p. 41.

1510.

Their last months in captivity have left us with quite a lot of evidence about the activities and character of Dudley who wrote prolifically giving his opinions about the government. Richard Empson, on the other hand, was preoccupied with sorting out his affairs and his estate in Northamptonshire, most of which on his attainder had reverted to the Crown. It would appear that at least some men took the opportunity of his imprisonment to try to claim back property that Richard had lawfully acquired. For example he appears to have leased the manor of Sesoncote with an agreement that the rent should be paid to Sir Edward Stanley, but the son of the original owner claimed that the manor was entailed to him and so he should have had the money. The son also claimed that Empson had not kept the house and church in good repair, had allowed cattle into the churchyard and had not kept up church services. Empson, rather indignantly, points out to the young man that his father would have sold "every styck and stone" of the place together with all of the valuable woods if he, Empson, had not restrained him. He adds that, given his present position, it is hardly his fault if the cattle had strayed, and not even to his advantage as there was better grazing elsewhere, but he promises to send instructions for "doores and lokken" to be fitted. The son has obviously also claimed that duties for the land are owing to the Abbot as Empson reminds him that not only Sesoncote senior, but also the son himself had told him that the Abbot had long since been recompensed by the family themselves.<sup>45</sup> The detail and reasonableness of Empson's response to the various claims made against him must cast some doubt on the validity of other accusations of sharp practice. It suggests that at least some people took advantage of his downfall both to deliberately blacken his character and for their own ends.

Richard and his wife Jane had two sons and four daughters, all of whom

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<sup>45</sup> PRO, SP1/1/61, pp. 161-163.

made good marriages. Thomas, the eldest, married Ethelreda, heiress to Sir Guy Wolston of Apethorpe and Tansover, (for which marriage Richard paid £100),<sup>46</sup> and John married Agnes, a daughter and co-heir of Henry Lovell of Harting, Sussex, and Preston Capes, Northamptonshire. Unfortunately for family survival neither of these marriages produced any offspring. The girls, on the other hand, founded much longer lines. Elizabeth married twice, both times into important local families. Her first husband was George Catesby of Ashby St Ledger and her second was Thomas Lucy of Charlecote, Warwickshire. Joan also married twice but her husbands came from further afield. The first was a colleague of her father's, Henry Sothill of Kinalton, Nottinghamshire, who was Attorney General to Henry VII and probably both fathers saw this as a good political alliance. Her second husband was also from Nottinghamshire - Sir William Pierrepont of Holme Pierrepont. A third (unnamed) daughter married more modestly to a man described as Tyrell of Thornton, Buckinghamshire, while Jane, the youngest, first married John Pinchon of Writtle in Essex and then Thomas Wilson who became Secretary of State to Queen Elizabeth.

After the execution of Sir Richard Empson, Henry VIII granted his estate to William Compton who was later knighted. His ownership was short lived, however, as the following year Richard's son, Thomas, was successful in his petition to Parliament to have the attainder on his father reversed and Thomas was restored to his lands. It is interesting to note that the rights of an heir to his inheritance, in spite of the actions of his father, were applied to recently acquired property and not just to ancient estates. Perhaps in this case Parliament was also moved by conscience as Richard Empson had certainly not deserved the accusation of traitor.

Thomas was faced with problems in re-possessing some of his inheritance, however, as the Earl of Kent, apparently disregarding his earlier

<sup>46</sup> *A Descriptive Catalogue of Ancient Deeds in the Public Record Office* vol. iv, p. 507.

quitclaim to Richard, claimed that the manor and hundred of Towcester and other property had been granted for life to his wife Elizabeth and confirmed by Letter Patent on the 28th January, 1510. The case went to appeal and both parties agreed to abide by the decision of the judges Thomas, Bishop of Durham, Thomas, Earl of Surrey and Treasurer of England and Sir John Fineox, Chief Justice of the King's Bench. The appeal was heard on 5th May, 1513, when the judges found in favour of Thomas Empson, with the proviso that he paid an annuity of £50 during the life of the Countess. The conditions for payment were very specific; Thomas had to pay £25 to the Earl and Countess on the 2nd November in the parish church of Towcester between 9am and 3pm. A second payment was due in April.<sup>47</sup>

Seven days after this judgment, quitclaims were made in favour of Thomas Empson by the Earl of Kent himself in which the number of houses and amount of land exactly matched those in the earlier quitclaim to Richard Empson.<sup>48</sup> On the same day another quitclaim to Thomas was made by Sir William Capell, Thomas Robertson and Thomas Guyllam quoting larger figures and relating to a previous 'purchase' in 1505 by Sir William from the Earl.<sup>49</sup> This was not the end of the story as a year later on 21st June, 1514, a final concord was signed between Thomas Empson and the Earl of Kent which quoted the original acreages etc. but seemed to say that Thomas had paid 1000 marks for the same.<sup>50</sup>

Thomas duly paid the annuity in two parts for four years as the receipts show. The first year they were signed by the Earl of Kent himself but then he granted the obligation to Sir John Hussey, Sir William Hussey and William Gascoigne.<sup>51</sup> Sir William Compton did not come entirely empty handed out of the

<sup>47</sup> Baker ii, p. 316.

<sup>48</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/27/9.

<sup>49</sup> NRO, FH MTD/27/8.

<sup>50</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/27/10.

<sup>51</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/21/1.

situation as Thomas appointed him as Steward of Towcester manor for which he received an annual rent of 4 marks.<sup>52</sup> It is interesting to note that someone in Sir William's position was willing to accept stewardship of another man's estate. Perhaps he wanted to safeguard his own interests as it emerged later that Thomas Empson was bound to him, Sir William Tyler and Nicholas Warwick for the sum of 2,000 marks - being part of a debt to the King. In total Thomas owed the King 3,000 marks (£2,000) and, although the origin of the debt is never stated, as it dated from when he recovered his estate it was almost certainly the price of his reinstatement.

For some years Thomas struggled with his financial problems, being allowed to pay off his debt at the rate of 100 marks at the feast of St John the Baptist and 100 marks at the feast of St Thomas the Martyr, but as later evidence shows he was unable to keep up this rate of repayment. In 1527 he was forced to sell off some of his land, including the manors of Easton Neston, Hulcote and Burton Latimer, to William Fermor of Somerton, Oxfordshire. There seems to be some question mark over the property (perhaps because of the debt) as the agreement specifies that if the buyer is evicted the vendor will give him an estate of equal value in the same county within half a year and pay compensation for expenses incurred.<sup>53</sup>

The relationship between Thomas Empson and William Fermor is unknown but William seems to be buying this property in an attempt to help Thomas and for "... the grete zeale love and favor which he hath and berith towards the seide Thomas Emsonne". This is further indicated by the fact that William immediately leased the property back to Thomas at a peppercorn rent and that only "... if it be asked". Only if Thomas produced an heir would the rent go up to 100 marks a year and in this event he retained the right to buy back the manors for £1,000, if he did so within four years of the birth.

<sup>52</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/27/11.

<sup>53</sup> NRO, FH MTD/E/32/3.



These measures were apparently not enough to rescue Thomas's fortunes as in 1530 he sold the rest of his estate to William Fermor's brother, Richard, a Merchant of the Staple of Calais. The sale document gives details of the debt owed to the King by Thomas Empson and how it was to be repaid.<sup>54</sup> By this date he had paid off 1,100 marks and still owed 1,900 which indicates a rate of less than the specified 200 marks a year unless interest was involved. Richard Fermor agreed to pay off the remaining debt in the twice yearly instalments and in addition he promised to pay Thomas an annual rent of £106. 13s. 4d. which would rise by another 100 marks if Thomas was still alive in ten years time (when the debt to the King would be cleared). Richard also agreed to maintain various annuities granted to long standing family servants.<sup>55</sup> Other annuities were to lawyers and estate officials and in all totalled over £26 a year. Once again Thomas was left with the option of buying back the property if he had a male heir. The terms set were a payment of 1,900 marks within six months after the birth, with interest at the rate of 50 marks per half year - a daunting prospect.<sup>56</sup> The Fermors continued in possession of the estate so quite clearly none of these circumstances arose and no more is known about Thomas Empson, who apparently died childless. As his brother John also died without issue, the family name came to an abrupt end, though descendants of their sisters continued for many generations.

Both the rise and decline of the Empson family fortunes were due to a combination of factors but the most influential among them seems to have been Richard Empson's choice of the law as a profession. This brought him into contact with men of money and influence and, as he was clearly a very able lawyer, several of them took an interest in furthering his career. In spite of his undoubted talent, without this influence he would never have reached a position

<sup>54</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/15/7&8.

<sup>55</sup> These had possibly been granted By Richard Empson as some of them were to people who had been imprisoned in the tower with him and his wife - an indication of a caring side to his nature?

<sup>56</sup> NRO, FH MTD/15/7 & 8.

of being in line for royal favour. Once in that situation he made the most of his opportunities by diligent and ruthless application to the task. However talented, ambitious or ruthless he might be, for a small town lawyer of modest background to rise to the heights that Richard Empson reached must depend to a certain degree on luck.

Fortune also favoured Richard in two major ways; first in the person of Richard III whose rejection of Empson proved to be in the latter's long term interests. His second stroke of fortune was the character of Henry VII, whose relentless pursuit of increasing royal fortunes, by at least pseudo legal means, provided the perfect opportunity for Richard's talents. One cannot entirely blame luck, or lack of it however, for his eventual demise, that must rest to some extent on his own actions in making powerful enemies. The problem with royal favour, even when it is as firmly rooted as Richard's seemed to be, is that it stands a good chance of only lasting as long as the lifetime of that particular monarch, whereas enmity can go on for ever.

Even without Richard's dramatic end, it is probable that the family would have declined on his death. Thomas comes across as a rather shadowy figure. There is no evidence of him being involved in any property dealing on his own behalf before his father's death, so that even without the debts that the nature of Richard's demise left him with, there is a good chance that his management of the estate would have led to a steady decline. In any case the end result would have been the same as the failure to produce heirs is final.

#### 4. THE FERMOR FAMILY

The Fermor family can be traced back to various towns in Oxfordshire in the fifteenth century, but one branch of the family established a chief residence in Northamptonshire in the early part of the sixteenth century when Richard Fermor acquired Easton Neston. Their wealth and status increased markedly from the late fifteenth century onwards but they also experienced serious problems because of their Roman Catholic adherence. Their fortune was based initially on trade but sheep farming, fortunate marriages and the law also made important contributions to their success. The first possible link with Northamptonshire came as early as 1432/3 when a Thomas Fermour witnessed a legal transaction in Hulcote - the area eventually bought by Richard (his son?).<sup>1</sup>

Fermor was apparently not the original family name. Henry Richard, who was said to be of Welsh descent, married Agnes, the daughter of a Fermor from Oxfordshire.<sup>2</sup> As the family went on to be successful wool merchants perhaps Henry visited Oxfordshire with his sheep; the trade in sheep and cattle between Wales and the Midlands is a well established fact. In his will, which was proved on the 18th October 1487, Henry was described as Henry Richards alias Fermere of Langford, "wolman". His trade comes through strongly in his will, as most of his bequests were in the form of ewes and lambs, though he did leave 10

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<sup>1</sup> NRO, FH MTD/E/21/3.

<sup>2</sup> For Family Tree, see Appendix 2d, p. 276.

marks to the church at Langford for the image of St George and to renew the seats and complete the pavement. He left a further 8 marks a year in wages for a chaplain to pray for the souls of his family for seven years.<sup>3</sup> These are quite sizeable sums and indicate a fair degree of wealth.

Henry left a son and heir, Thomas, a successful wool merchant who added to his fortune by making two good marriages. By his first wife, Alice, Thomas had one son, Lawrence, who was obviously successful in his own right, but there are few recorded connections between him and the rest of the family. He married Elizabeth, the daughter of his father's second wife by her first husband, Henry Wenman,<sup>4</sup> and probably produced four children. William, Joane and Thomas apparently died without issue but Mary married Thomas Benolt who was Clarencieux, King of Arms - one of the two regional chief heralds under the Garter King of Arms.<sup>5</sup>

The Fermor story really begins with the second marriage of Thomas to Emmotte, the daughter and heiress of Symkin Harvey of Hereford and widow of Henry Wenman, another wool merchant.<sup>6</sup> Thomas and Emmotte produced three sons, John, William and Richard, but the order and date of their births is confused. John is usually regarded as the eldest but it is not clear whether William or Richard came next. Baker suggests that it was Richard but Bindoff calculates that Richard was born between 1480 and 1484 while William was born by 1480. Bindoff also suggests that Richard was under age at his mother's death in 1501 but of age by 1505, but this seems to be a misinterpretation as

<sup>3</sup> PRO, PCC Godyn 22; *Some Oxfordshire Wills 1393-1510*, J. Weaver & A. Bearwood (eds.), Oxfordshire Record Society vol. XXXIX, pp. 26-27.

<sup>4</sup> The marriage of stepchildren was a common practice to ensure that land and money stayed in the family.

<sup>5</sup> *Visitations*, Northamptonshire, pp. 19-20.

<sup>6</sup> *VCH Oxon.* 6, p. 292. The Wenmans were a very wealthy family which had settled in Witney in the early part of the fifteenth century. Richard Wenman, the son of Henry and Emmotte was assessed in 1524 at £1,200 and of the tax assessment of Witney he paid £43. 6s. 8d. out of the total assessment of £53. 3s. 8d. He was one of the wealthiest merchants in England and a prime example of the concentration of wealth and capital which has been noted in several towns. - *Court Books of Witney*, pp. liv, lx.

both Richard and William were executors for their mother.<sup>7</sup> Also in 1501, Richard is named as a trustee when John Isbury makes a gift of land to the use of William Fermor and his heirs.<sup>8</sup> Dame Emmotte's will would also indicate that William was older than Richard as she seems to mention her sons in order of age. On the other hand the *Victoria County History* for Oxfordshire confidently states that William was Richard's younger brother, and Richard did follow his father and grandfather in the family business while William went into the law which was often the pattern for a younger son.<sup>9</sup> Whatever the order of their births, however, it has no bearing on their history. Their affairs were often intertwined and Richard's sons inherited the combined estates.

Thomas Richards, alias Fermour, died in 1485, the year that the Tudor dynasty began, but there is no indication of any involvement in, or of problems caused by the upheavals in the country of the preceding decades. On the contrary, Thomas had clearly prospered in a modest way as a wool merchant. He had acquired property at Witney (perhaps through Emmotte), where he made his home, and land in several other Oxfordshire and Berkshire villages. At his death in 1485, his heir was said to be his son John, but little is known about John and he is not important in the ensuing family history.<sup>10</sup> It is possible that John died before 1501 as he is not mentioned in his mother's will. In his own will, Thomas made little distinction between his sons - John received £100 and land in Cogges and Burford while the other three boys got 200 marks and land - Laurence at Chadlington, Richard at Filkins and Langford and William at Witney and Hale. At this time all of the boys were under age but the legacies were left safely in the hands of Emmotte.<sup>11</sup>

Dame Emmotte died in 1501, a wealthy woman in her own right. She had

<sup>7</sup> Bindoff, pp. 124, 127; PRO wills, PCC Moone 22.

<sup>8</sup> CCR 1501, pp. 86-87, n. 236.

<sup>9</sup> VCH Oxon. 6, p. 292.

<sup>10</sup> IPM 1 Hen VII, pp. 169-70.

<sup>11</sup> NRO, PCC 19 Logge; Weaver & Bearwood, *Oxfordshire Wills*, p. 37.

continued to live at Witney, next door to her son William and near her first husband's family, the Wenmans. She left each of her sons, Richard Wenman, John Wenman, William Fermor and Richard Fermor, £100 and further land in various villages. She also left smaller amounts to her daughters and to the children of her daughter Elizabeth and stepson Laurence. She made various bequests to the church at Witney, including £4 for a canopy, 13s. 4d to repair the bells and 40 shillings to repair the church itself, and smaller amounts to other churches in the neighbourhood; 13s. 4d. to each of Bradwell, Kelmescote and Minster Lovell to buy them vestments, 20 shillings each to Bleebury and Langford and 40 shillings for repairs to the church at Abingdon. The poor at Abingdon were also remembered with 12d to each of the inhabitants of both the new and old almshouses and the four orders of friars in Oxford got 10 shillings each. She also left £4 towards repairing the new bridge at Stanlake.<sup>12</sup>

Although at the time of his mother's death, William Fermor's residence was at Witney and he probably derived his main income from sheep farming, his real interest was in law. By 1504 he had acquired an interest in Somerton when the long time owners, the Astons, apparently fell on hard times and conveyed their moiety of Somerton to a group of trustees which included William's stepbrother, Richard Wenman, for £287.<sup>13</sup> The agreement was for the Astons to be tenants for life with remainder to William Fermor. William Aston died in 1504 and William Fermor took possession.<sup>14</sup> The inquisition taken at William Aston's death says that Aston had held some of his land from William Fermor as part of his manor of Gyffards.<sup>15</sup> William soon established himself at Somerton and built a new manor house there. His wealth was obviously already considerable as it is

<sup>12</sup>PRO, PCC 22 Moone; Weaver & Bearwood, *Oxfordshire Wills*, pp. 70-71. Bequests for roads and bridges often featured in wills and the clear passage of people and goods would have been particularly important to a merchant family like the Fermors.

<sup>13</sup>VCH Oxon. 6, p. 292.

<sup>14</sup>VCH Ibid.; *Tusmore Papers*, L.G. Wickham Legg (ed.), Oxfordshire Record Society, vol. XX, p.4.

<sup>15</sup>IPM Hen VII vol 3, n. 173.

probable that he was also responsible for extensions to the church at Somerton. In the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century a clerestory and embattled parapet were added to the nave and the south aisle lengthened to create a chantry at the east end with the aisle itself becoming the burial place for William's descendants.<sup>16</sup>

It is possible that Richard Fermor also had some legal training as Bindoff says that he entered the Inner Temple in 1518,<sup>17</sup> but he followed his father and grandfather into the wool trade and by 1505 had become a Merchant of the Staple of Calais. At this stage it is not possible to identify the friends and patrons who undoubtedly furthered his career. A fair degree of influence must have been involved for two of the sons of an Oxfordshire merchant to do so well in different spheres. Richard's interests went beyond wool and he traded on a large scale in a variety of goods. In 1512 he obtained part of the contract to supply food to the King's army during the Tournai campaign where the scale of his operations can be seen. Together with William Browne junior (his future brother-in-law) and George Medley, he entered into a contract to supply 10,000 barrels of wheat flour which later accounts show to be worth 10 shillings a barrel.<sup>18</sup> Later payments also mention casks, malt, oats, beer and a flitch of bacon and he supplied harness to the value of £113. 11s. 10d. to the field besides Guisnes.<sup>19</sup> He also profited from the sale of large quantities of armour and munitions - receipts include 1,323 gunstones weighing 17,611 lbs and also "gunpowdre called corne powdre", saltpetre and "marespikes".<sup>20</sup>

William Fermor also seems to have had friends in high places who were able to help promote his interests, in his case his legal career. He had already been a clerk in the Exchequer and deputy to the first Lord Daubenay when in

<sup>16</sup> *VCH Oxon.* 6, p. 295.

<sup>17</sup> Bindoff, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> *LP* 1, nos. 1497, 2833.

<sup>19</sup> *LP* 1, nos. 2772 (41), 2118.

<sup>20</sup> *LP* 1, nos. 2668, 2832, 2833.

1508 he was appointed Clerk of the Crown and King's Attorney in the Court of the King's Bench for life.<sup>21</sup> He resigned from the former positions on taking up these new appointments which brought with it tangible rewards. The annual fee was only £10 but almost certainly he would have received gratuities from grateful litigants before the court. This position was probably also the reason that in 1512 he was granted a second moiety of Somerton manor for the rent of £15. 0s. 11d. This share of the manor had been in the King's hands since the attainder of Francis, Lord Lovell - a neighbour of the Fermors.<sup>22</sup>

By 1510 William was already a widower for the first time. There is some disagreement between Northamptonshire *Visitations*, Baker and Bindoff about the order of his four wives, but as Catherine, daughter of Sir William Paulet of Hinton St George, Somerset is known to have died 26th May, 1510, Bindoff puts her as the first. The middle two being Joan, the widow of William Marrow of Redfern, Warwickshire and an unknown woman who Baker suggests was a widow and Northamptonshire *Visitations* puts as the daughter of a London merchant. Everyone agrees that the last wife was Elizabeth, daughter of Sir William Norris of Yattendon, Berkshire who outlived him.<sup>23</sup> The four women represent a very broad geographical spread, perhaps an indication of business interests. It is likely that all four marriages added to William's wealth but not one of them resulted in any heirs. Richard, on the other hand, who in 1515 made a good marriage to Anne, one of the daughters of Sir William Browne who was at one time Lord Mayor of London, produced five sons and five daughters. Anne's brother, William, died without heirs and his estate was divided equally between the children of his three sisters. This resulted in Richard Fermor's children each receiving £200.<sup>24</sup>

When and how Richard made the move is unrecorded, but by 1509 he

<sup>21</sup> Bindoff, pp. 127-8; *CPR 1494-1509*, pp. 622, 624.

<sup>22</sup> *VCH Oxon* 6, p. 292; *LP* 1, p. 509.

<sup>23</sup> *Visitations*, Northamptonshire, pp. 19-20; Baker ii, p. 142; Bindoff, p.127.

<sup>24</sup> NRO, FH MTD/F/35/11.



had moved out of Oxfordshire and was living at Isham, Northamptonshire, when he was named as one of the jurors in the trial of Sir Richard Empson at Northampton Castle.<sup>25</sup> Richard Fermor's career continued to prosper, probably as a result of his support of the military campaign at Tournai. He was granted frequent licences to export wool direct to Italy - for example on 5th February 1513 he received a licence to export six hundred sacks of wool.<sup>26</sup> In the same year, at Henry VIII's request, Margaret of Savoy had granted him a passport which enabled him to export duty free from Flanders 144,000 bushels of wheat for which the duty would have been £1,000.<sup>27</sup> His privileged position was shown in other ways such as when he was threatened with trading losses because of piracy in 1515, Henry VIII ordered his ambassadors to seek compensation.<sup>28</sup> Royal support clearly came at a price, however, as in 1521 he was found to be in debt to the Crown to the extent of £1,100 for "casual obligations" and by 1523 he still owed £400.<sup>29</sup>

As well as making his fortune through his business ventures, Richard Fermor was also amassing land and property in various parts of the country. For example he bought several of the Bedfordshire manors of Luton including Luton Hoo, which he purchased from the daughter of Sir Thomas de Hoo, and in June 1512 he was granted manors in Norfolk and Suffolk which had been the property of Edward de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps Richard's wealth was one of the keys to his obvious royal favour as in July 1532, together with Sir John Dudley, Richard Rich and Sir Arthur Darcy, he stood surety for a loan made by the King to Sir Edward Seymour.<sup>31</sup> Some indication of his actual financial position came in

<sup>25</sup> *LP* 1, n. 1548. It was rather ironic that some years later Richard Fermor purchased a large part of the Empson estate from Thomas Empson.

<sup>26</sup> *LP* 1, n. 1662 (13).

<sup>27</sup> *LP* 1, n. 1566.

<sup>28</sup> Bindoff, p.126; *LP* 2, n. 738.

<sup>29</sup> *LP* 3, nos. 1153, 3694.

<sup>30</sup> *LP* 1, n. 2055 (95).

<sup>31</sup> *LP* 5, n. 1205.

his assessment for the subsidy of 1546 when he was assessed for £1,000.

During the 1520s and 1530s, evidence begins to emerge of people who might have been patrons of the Fermor brothers. When Richard was in Florence in 1524 his advice was sought by Cardinal Wolsey's agent, John Clerk, on ways of maintaining a supply of money for the wars with France. Richard was pessimistic about the likely support from local merchants but he covered 8,000 crowns himself, apparently rather unwillingly as Lord Russell in a letter to Wolsey comments "...he says it is only to serve the king for he will not profit by it".<sup>32</sup> Richard was clearly well known to Wolsey whose help was sought by Christopher Coe in a dispute with Richard over the wardship of Francis Putter.<sup>33</sup> When Wolsey fell from favour in 1529 he was found to owe Richard £125 for silks, cloth of gold and baudekins supplied.<sup>34</sup> William Fermor was also linked with Wolsey as he was involved in the preparation of a pardon which was probably the basis of a payment of £100 that he received in May 1531.<sup>35</sup> Another possible family patron was the Earl of Derby as in 1534 Richard Fermor was appointed as his Chief Steward in Northamptonshire.<sup>36</sup>

By this time Richard had made Easton Neston his chief residence, though it was his brother William who first acquired an interest in the Empson estate, at Easton Neston and other manors, when he purchased it from Thomas Empson in 1527 for £1,000. He obviously never intended to live there, however, as he leased it straight back to Thomas for a peppercorn rent.<sup>37</sup> When, in 1530, Richard Fermor acquired most of the rest of the Empson estate from Thomas for another £1,000, William seems to have given or sold to his brother the portion that he had

<sup>32</sup> *LP* 4, nos. 939, 942, 1085, 1086, 1131, 1245, 1336. This correspondence is wrongly interpreted by the *Dictionary of National Biography* as Richard giving financial assistance to Wolsey's agent in negotiations for Wolsey's bid for the papacy.

<sup>33</sup> *LP* 4, nos. 4065, 4909.

<sup>34</sup> *LP* 4, nos. 6006 (2), 6748 (4).

<sup>35</sup> Bindoff, p. 127; *LP* 4, n. 6748 (15).

<sup>36</sup> Bindoff, p. 125.

<sup>37</sup> NRO, FH MTD/E/32/3.

already purchased.<sup>38</sup> The brothers were involved in litigation with Richard Verney over ownership of this estate but the Fermors were victorious.<sup>39</sup> At around the same time Richard seemed to be buying up any land in the area that came on the market. For example in 1531 he paid Thomas Tebby £15 for a house and land in Foscot and in 1532 he bought property in Towcester for £98 which Humphrey Tyrell had inherited via his wife Jane Ingleton.<sup>40</sup>

William Fermor, meanwhile, was successfully pursuing his legal career. Bindoff suggests that he was a member of the Inner Temple as a William Fermor was involved with another barrister in securing the free admission to the Inn of one Guy Wade.<sup>41</sup> In 1539 his work for the King's Bench brought him and his wife an annuity of £20.<sup>42</sup> His London home was in Mugwell Street, St. Olave's, Farringdon and he suffered a burglary from there in 1533.<sup>43</sup> His chief residence, however was still at Somerton and his position as a man of local standing strengthened. In 1511 he had been appointed a Justice of the Peace for Oxfordshire<sup>44</sup> and from 1512 onwards he was regularly included on commissions of various kinds both for the city and county. For example in 1513 a commission to seize the property of the King of Scotland included William Fermor for Oxfordshire.<sup>45</sup> He retained the family interest in sheep and by the 1530s he was one of England's largest woolmen with a list of 1533 showing that he had 150 sacks of wool "growing and gathering".<sup>46</sup> He was accused more than once of converting arable land to pasture at both Hardwick and Somerton.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>38</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/15/5, 7, 8.

<sup>39</sup> LP 6, n. 919.

<sup>40</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/17

<sup>41</sup> Bindoff, p. 127.

<sup>42</sup> LP 14, n. 3296.

<sup>43</sup> LP 6, n. 419 (5). Strangely, perhaps, given William's position, the porter who stole a quantity of plate and other effects was pardoned for his crime.

<sup>44</sup> LP 1, pt. ii, appendix.

<sup>45</sup> LP 1, n. 2222.

<sup>46</sup> *Calendar of the Court Books of the Borough of Witney 1538-1610*, J. Bolton & M. Maslem (eds.), Oxfordshire Record Society, vol. LIV, p. lxi.

<sup>47</sup> Leadham, *The Domesday of Enclosures*, vol. i, pp. 348-9, 367.

In 1535 William Fermor was shown a small favour when, together with Sir Edward Chamberlay, he was granted the next presentation to the church of Shipston-on-Stour, Oxfordshire, and the next year he and Richard, with others, had a similar grant at Bradnish, Devon.<sup>48</sup> In 1536 William was summoned to raise thirty men for service against the northern rebels<sup>49</sup> and in 1539 he was Commissioner for Musters for Poughley hundred, Oxfordshire, where he supplied ten furnished men himself.<sup>50</sup> Recognition of a more substantial nature was a bit slower to arrive. He was on the list for Sheriff for Oxfordshire and Berkshire in 1520 and again in 1522 but not pricked by the King for nearly another eleven years - the first of his two terms was 1533-34.<sup>51</sup> His brother Richard had been on the list for Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire in 1532, 1533 and 1534 but like William was not actually pricked.<sup>52</sup>

After Wolsey's demise, William Fermor developed a position as one of Thomas Cromwell's trusted agents in Oxfordshire, consolidating this by reporting to him directly about alleged seditious speeches. One in 1537 was supposedly made by a priest but when William investigated he decided that the accusation was brought maliciously.<sup>53</sup> Also in 1537 Cromwell asked William to investigate allegations of treason made against the Abbots of Eynsham and Osney.<sup>54</sup> In 1539 he was included in the reception for Anne of Cleves<sup>55</sup> and in the same year he was chosen as a Member of Parliament for Oxfordshire - possibly through Cromwell's influence.<sup>56</sup> As a member of a staunch Roman Catholic family his personal thoughts on the Reformation are unknown but he apparently stood by the royal supremacy and his loyalty was never questioned.

<sup>48</sup> *LP* 5, nos. 1270 (10), 417.

<sup>49</sup> *LP* 11, n. 580.

<sup>50</sup> *LP* 14, appendix 15.

<sup>51</sup> *LP* 3, nos. 1042, 2020; *LP* 6, n. 1481 (29).

<sup>52</sup> *LP* 5, n. 1598 (10); *LP* 6, n. 1481 (29); *LP* 7, n. 1498.

<sup>53</sup> *LP* 12, n. 518.

<sup>54</sup> *LP* 12, n. 127.

<sup>55</sup> *LP* 14, n. 572 (3 iv).

<sup>56</sup> Bindoff, p. 127.

Although he also remained a Catholic, Richard Fermor got through the first years after the break with Rome in continuing favour and even tried to benefit from the Dissolution by offering 600 marks a year for land at Greens Norton. He was unsuccessful in his bid, however, as the land went to Sir Arthur Darcy.<sup>57</sup> In 1537 he was a collector for the Subsidy and paid in £176. 44s. 11d. from the wards of Farrington, Within and Queenhithe.<sup>58</sup> Also in 1537 he was even appointed as a juror for the trials of those involved in the northern rebellion - a conflict in which he was once again involved in supplying the royal forces.<sup>59</sup> Three years later, however, he was himself attainted for breaches of the Act extinguishing the authority of the Bishop of Rome.<sup>60</sup> His crime was very minor and the *Dictionary of National Biography* suggests that he owed his downfall to the enmity of his brother's patron, Cromwell, being jealous of his wealth and lifestyle. On the other hand, the French ambassador, Marillac, hints that this was a convenient charge and that Richard was a marked man for speaking out "...too boldly against the King's rights and prerogatives" in the Commons.<sup>61</sup> This indicates that he was a member of the 1539 Parliament (for London) but there is no other actual evidence of this and the chronicler Edward Hall (who was himself an MP) made no mention of it in his brief reference to the case. The only support for the notion that he was an member comes from the fact that in 1540 only three letters were sent out to London members when there should have been four of them. The missing member would have been chosen by the Court of Common Council for whom Richard Fermor, as a liveryman and leading merchant, would have been a logical choice.<sup>62</sup> Marillac also gives a clue to the character of Richard who he said was "...much loved and [his attainder] regretted by both

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<sup>57</sup> LP 12 ii, n.59.

<sup>58</sup> LP 13, n. 249 ii.

<sup>59</sup> LP 12, n. 1199 (4).

<sup>60</sup> LP 15, 650.

<sup>61</sup> LP 15, n. 697.

<sup>62</sup> Bindoff, p. 125.

foreign and Englishmen".<sup>63</sup>

Richard was actually charged with shielding his Catholic chaplain and confessor, Nicholas Thayne. Thayne had been charged with serious dissidence, found guilty by the local Justices of the Peace at Northampton Castle at Michaelmas 1539 and sent to prison in Buckingham Castle. He was alleged to have preached a sermon the previous July in support of the Pope and, in the following December, interrupted the vicar at Easton Neston while the latter was preaching against Rome. In addition he had not obliterated the word 'pope' whenever it appeared in a religious text but merely covered it with wax which could be cracked off.<sup>64</sup> Nothing was proved against Richard except that he had visited Thane in prison and given him 8d. and a couple of shirts but he was found guilty on 9th May 1540 and sentenced to life imprisonment and forfeiture of his estate.<sup>65</sup> Inventories were taken of his goods at his house in London, Easton Neston and elsewhere. His London goods were worth only £31. 15s. 1d. as it was said that his plate and "best stuff" were kept at Easton Neston. The value of goods at Easton Neston is not given but from the details of the inventory it must have been a substantial house with a porters lodge, its own brewhouse, bakehouse, alehouse and fishhouse with a park containing thirty three deer. In all of his properties there is evidence of the family's religious fervour with mention of a chapel, altar cloths, a picture of the Holy Ghost and ceiling pictures of Mary Magdalen.<sup>66</sup>

The case against Richard was notable enough to be recorded in the *Wriothesleys Chronicle*, which agrees with Marillac and comments -

This yere the eight daie of Maie Mr. Richard Farmar, grocer, of London, a man of great londes and substance, was arraigned in the Kinges Bench at Westmester for misprisonmente of certaine seditious wordes spoken by him against the Kinges Majestie; wherfore he was

<sup>63</sup> LP 15, n. 697.

<sup>64</sup> J.J. Scarisbrick, 'Religion and Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, vol. V, no. 2, p. 85; PRO, KB 9/544, rot. 12.

<sup>65</sup> NRO, FH MTD/F/25/11.

<sup>66</sup> LP 15, n. 650.

that daie condemned to perpetuall prison and all his landes and goodes forfett to the King, which was great pitie that he used himself so, for he was a gentle person and welbeloved in the cittie, and had kept a great howse in the cittie, and had married his children to great mariages.<sup>67</sup>

J.J. Scarisbrick sees Richard as a remarkable (and neglected) man to be so actively dissident as late as 1538-39. He speculates whether if the Pilgrimage of Grace of 1536 had spread to Northamptonshire, Richard could have been another Robert Aske with Thayne as Northampton's vicar of Louth. He suggests that it could so easily have happened as although many of Northamptonshire's big landowners were doing well out of sheep farming, the people were suffering from the effects of enclosure. There was wide-spread unemployment and large numbers of newly created landless men wandered the countryside looking for work. It only needed a spark of leadership, but therein lay the key; although Northamptonshire had many important gentry families it had no great magnate. The only member of the nobility was Lord Vaux of Harrowden but, although ardent Roman Catholics, the family were never activists in any cause.<sup>68</sup> Edmund Knightley might have filled the gap as he was certainly aggressive enough and had reason to feel alienated from the Crown, but his character was such that he was too interested in himself to become a credible leader.<sup>69</sup> In making preparations to combat the rebels, Henry VIII first planned to make his base at Northampton and incredibly, it was to Edmund Knightley and his friends and to Richard Fermor that he turned for support. At this stage, Richard's loyalty to the Crown was obviously unquestioned but it was a sign of Henry VIII's increasing paranoia that friends could be seen as enemies almost overnight.

After his sentence Richard was at first committed to Marshalsea prison but was released by August of the same year, probably through the intervention of

<sup>67</sup> *Wriothesleys Chronicle - A Chronicle of England during the Reign of the Tudors 1485-1559*, vol.1 (ed.), W.D. Hamilton, Camden Society, new series, 2, no. X1 ((1874-75), p. 119,

<sup>68</sup> Perhaps the hardships they suffered for being active Lancastrians had made them wary.

<sup>69</sup> Scarisbrick, 'Religion and politics', pp. 88-90. Lord Audley described Edmund as "wilful and full of fond inventions".

his brother William, who had supported him throughout the trial and stood surety for his appearance before the Privy Council for £1,000.<sup>70</sup> In addition to his brother, Richard also had many powerful friends - several of them related by marriage. Because of his wealth and royal favour he had been absorbed very quickly into the Northamptonshire gentry, particularly by members of the Knightley 'faction'. His eldest son, John, had made an excellent marriage to Maude, a daughter of Lord Vaux of Harrowden. His eldest daughter Joane first married Robert Wilford of Kent, a London alderman who in 1542 was also accused of being a 'maintainer' of the Pope.<sup>71</sup> Her second husband was John, Lord Mordaunt of Drayton and Turvey (another Catholic). On the other hand, Mary, the youngest of the five daughters, married the Protestant Sir Richard Knightley, nephew to Edmund and son and heir of Sir Valentine Knightley of Fawsley. Elizabeth Fermor married another of the Knightley group, Thomas Lovell of Astwell (who also stood surety for £1,000 on Richard's release) while Anne married across the county boundary but her husband, William Lucy of Charlecote, Warwickshire, was part of the same group, and Ursula married Richard Fiennes, Baron of Say and Sele.<sup>72</sup> Two of Richard's sons died in infancy and of the final two, Jerome married Jane of unknown parentage, but Thomas made two good marriages. His first wife was Frances, daughter and heir of Thomas Horde of Bridgnorth and widow of Edmund Raleigh of Farthinghoe, Northamptonshire. His second bride was Bridget, the daughter and eventual coheir of Sir Henry Bradshaw of Halton, Buckinghamshire, and widow of Henry White of South Warnborough, Hampshire. Some of these marriages were clearly after Richard's fall from grace, perhaps an indication of the extent of his reinstatement.

After his release from prison, Richard Fermor lived quietly at first at the rectory of Wappenham where he owned the advowson of the living. While he

<sup>70</sup> *LP* 15, nos. 1005, 1021.

<sup>71</sup> Bindoff, p. 125.

<sup>72</sup> This marriage may have been arranged by William Fermor who was an executor of Richard Fiennes' father and also related by marriage to Henry Norris who bought the wardship of Fiennes.



was in prison he had been specifically excluded from the general pardon of 1540 but in 1541 he received his own pardon and in 1542 some of his property was returned to him - namely the manors of Marstons Butlers and Pebworth, Warwickshire and some property in Essex and Somerset. Once again his brother apparently came to his assistance with financial help.

During the 1540s William Fermor continued to prosper and he purchased considerable property including Godington manor and Nethercote Grange, Steeple Aston, both in Oxfordshire. He also bought back some of Richard's former possessions with the possible intention of restoring them to his brother. For example he paid £304 for the manor of Walton, in Walton and Kings Sutton, which had already been recovered by Richard's own son Thomas and his son-in-law, Robert Wilford. William resigned from the King's Bench in 1542 but he went on to serve a second term as Sheriff for Oxfordshire and Berkshire in 1542-43 and to serve on all county commissions of Edward's reign.<sup>73</sup> In 1552 he was appointed as Escheator for Northamptonshire but in 1553 this post was held by William Giffard while William Fermor performed the same role for Oxfordshire.<sup>74</sup> In 1544 he was appointed to conduct ten men to France for war. Although not as active in Catholicism as his brother, William must have come under some suspicion as he was included in a general pardon under Edward VI when he was still described as Coroner and Attorney of the King's Bench.<sup>75</sup>

After the death of Henry VIII, more possessions were returned to Richard Fermor. In July 1547 Edward VI granted him all oxen, sheep etc., silver and gilt plate and all other goods which had come to Henry VIII on Richard's attainder and which had not already been sold or converted to the King's use.<sup>76</sup> In March 1550 we get some indication of Richard's wealth when lands to the yearly value of £385 were restored. These included Easton Neston, together with property in

<sup>73</sup> eg. *CPR 1547-48*, p. 88; *1550-53*, pp. 140-42; *1553*, p. 357.

<sup>74</sup> *CPR 1553*, p. 362.

<sup>75</sup> *CPR 1548-49*, p. 145.

<sup>76</sup> *CPR 1547-48*, p. 183.

Hampshire, Warwickshire and Bedfordshire, and there is evidence of how he had benefitted from the Dissolution by gaining the possessions of Montagu Priory, Somerset, the house and site of Swardsley Priory (which was in the manor of Easton Neston), the lands of Thomas Broke which had been held by Swardsley and some land belonging to St James Monastery, Northampton.<sup>77</sup>

There is a story, repeated by all writers on the Fermors, that Richard had once had a jester called Will Somers who later became popular in the royal household and that Somers used his privileged position to speak up for his former master. Baker confidently asserts that this pricked the conscience of Henry VIII who unfortunately died before he could make restitution, but there is no direct evidence relating to the case.<sup>78</sup> Evidence of Richard's renewed wealth and contacts comes from him being able to make a loan of £100 to William Parr, Marquess of Northampton and Earl of Essex, to be repaid in 1552, and also from him once again being in a position to purchase land. In 1551 he bought property in several parishes around Easton Neston from Henry Smythe, who had had them from Thomas Davy, and from John Smythe he bought, for 40 shillings, three acres of arable in Woodburcote.<sup>79</sup>

Richard Fermor died at Easton Neston on 17th November 1551 and was buried in the church there.<sup>80</sup> His eldest son, John, who was thirty six years old at the time, succeeded to the main estate,<sup>81</sup> but Richard had already made provisions for other members of the family in his will of July 1550, soon after his lands were restored.<sup>82</sup> His bequests included £20 to his brother William, asking him to be good to his children. William certainly fulfilled this request as on his death in September 1553 he left bequests to Richard's sons, John, Thomas and

<sup>77</sup> *CPR 1550-53*, p. 22.

<sup>78</sup> Baker ii, p. 142.

<sup>79</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/28/13, F/23/4.

<sup>80</sup> *IPM 5* Edw VI, p. 2 n. 30. His tomb wrongly puts his death as November 1552 and Northamptonshire *Visitations* as January 1552.

<sup>81</sup> NRO, FH MTD/H/1/2.

<sup>82</sup> PRO, PCC 3 Powell.

Jerome, and made Thomas his main heir after his surviving wife, Elizabeth Norris.

Although for many years they enjoyed obvious royal favour, it is interesting to note that neither Richard nor William Fermor were ever knighted. In Richard's case his Catholic faith might have told against him even before his attainder, but this cannot explain the omission as far as William was concerned. The situation was redressed soon after their deaths, however, when in 1553 Richard's eldest son, John, was created a knight on the morning after Mary's coronation (for once the family's Catholicism was to their advantage). It is probable that John earned his knighthood as an active supporter of Mary in the brief Northamptonshire conflict over the succession. He soon went on to replace Sir Nicholas Throckmorton (a Protestant) as the senior Knight of the Shire in the first Parliament of Mary's reign.<sup>83</sup>

Sir John Fermor's main interests were always on the local rather than the national scene, although he had received a legal training at the Inner Temple like his uncle William. In 1554 he was granted custody for life of Benefield in Rockingham Forest together with other offices such as Yeoman and Groom-Keeper. As part of this job, he was allowed all trees felled by wind and any dead wood.<sup>84</sup> By 1556 he was a Justice of the Peace for Northamptonshire and in 1557-58 he was pricked as Sheriff. At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign he was included in a general pardon roll<sup>85</sup> and three years later he was appointed to a Commission of the Peace.<sup>86</sup> The same year he was granted the wardship and marriage of Edward Leigh for £20<sup>87</sup> but he gradually took even less part in public affairs and may have been removed from the Bench after being included as one

<sup>83</sup> Bindoff, p. 124.

<sup>84</sup> *CPR 1553-54*, p. 220.

<sup>85</sup> *CPR 1558-60*, p. 157.

<sup>86</sup> *CPR 1560-63*, p. 440.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

of the local Justices who hindered religion in the report of 1564.<sup>88</sup>

When William Fermor's widow died in 1556, Sir John inherited the lands that William had owned in Northamptonshire. Bindoff saw him as "an enterprising, indeed grasping landlord" on account of trouble with neighbours over disputed property in Easton Neston. This had been a long standing quarrel dating from before his father's death and he persuaded his mother to reject the arbitrators suggestion that they should give other lands in compensation for keeping the Easton Neston property. He was active and unscrupulous in trying to evict tenants of whom he disapproved, maybe because they had gained their leases when the Fermor estates were in the hands of Henry VIII.<sup>89</sup> He continued to add to his estate in the area of Easton Neston such as purchasing houses and land from Thomas Law of Towcester in 1555.<sup>90</sup> The next year he used his legal knowledge to set up a trust to avoid feudal dues on Corscombe and Towcester manors and lands on his death. He used Thomas Fermor (his brother) and Thomas Lucy (his nephew ?) as trustees for his heirs. They were to pay him £120 in rents per annum.<sup>91</sup> He later entailed his estate and set up trusts to cater for his younger children, with William, Lord Vaux of Harrowden (his nephew), and Sir Walter Mildmay as trustees.<sup>92</sup> He had also added to his estate by purchasing the manor of Towcester and the hundred of Wymersley.

Sir John Fermor died in December 1571 and was succeeded by his eldest son, George, who served Elizabeth in a military capacity and was knighted in the Netherlands in 1586. John's younger brother, Thomas, was equally successful both in his own lifetime and in establishing a long line of male heirs. He followed his father, Richard, as a Merchant of the Staple and in the Grocers Company. He was still in the trade in 1544 when he joined with his brother-in-law, Robert

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<sup>88</sup> Bindoff, p. 124.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/18/6.

<sup>91</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/15/2.

<sup>92</sup> Bindoff, p. 124.

Wilford, to purchase the manor of Walton in Kings Sutton, which had belonged to his father before his attainder. In 1548 he had licence to sell the same to his uncle, William Fermor, who returned it in his bequests to Thomas.<sup>93</sup>

After the death of his father and uncle, Thomas was soon engaged in public affairs. Together with his brother, Sir John Fermor, and his brother-in-law, Sir John Mordaunt, he was a member of Queen Mary's first Parliament in 1553. Thomas represented Brackley in Northamptonshire, but Bindoff suggests that he owed this more to the patronage of the Earl of Derby, as lord of Brackley, than to his own family connections in that part of the county.<sup>94</sup>

As the husband of Bridget, heiress of the Bradshaw estates in Shropshire, Thomas may have given up trade and settled in the North as in 1556, when he became a trustee for his brother John, he was described as of Bridgnorth. His marriage brought him links with several leading Shropshire families to which he owed his election to Mary's last Parliament in 1558; this time as a Knight of that Shire. In the same year he was chosen as Sheriff for Shropshire but by then Elizabeth was on the throne. In spite of being an ardent Catholic he was for a while a Justice of the Peace, from 1561-64, and Recorder for Bridgnorth from 1561, but was removed from the Bench after Bishop Scory's review in 1564 had included him as one "... deemed not favourable to this religion".<sup>95</sup>

Thomas obviously divided his interests between Shropshire and the Midlands as alongside his appointment in 1562 to a Commission of the Peace for Shropshire,<sup>96</sup> he had a third term as an MP, this time representing High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, from 1562-63.<sup>97</sup> Around the same time he was involved with other Shropshire Catholics in sheltering the Marian priest, John

<sup>93</sup> *CPR 1548-49*, p. 88.

<sup>94</sup> Bindoff, p. 126.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *CPR 1560-63*, p. 442.

<sup>97</sup> His link with Buckinghamshire also stemmed from his wife who had inherited the manors of Halsot and Wendover. Bindoff does not mention this third term but the proximity of High Wycombe to these manors suggests that this MP was the same Thomas Fermor.

Felton, and soon afterwards was informed against for his visits to Sir Thomas Stanley at Tong.<sup>98</sup> After these episodes he took no further part in public affairs. He came into possession of his uncle's estate on the death of his aunt Elizabeth in the late 1560s or early 70s and made arrangements for Somerton manor to be held in trust for his son Richard.

Thomas Fermor died in 1580 and Bindoff suggests that his will of 15th June 1580 provides an illustration of 'Seigneurial Catholicism' as he left leases to families who could be traced for many years as Oxfordshire Catholics.<sup>99</sup> By this will he founded a school at Somerton for the service of God, the Crown and the Commonwealth, but entrusted the education of his own son to a Catholic kinsman, George Shirley of Staunton Harold, Leicestershire. George Shirley was one of six executors of his will, who were probably all Catholics, but Thomas showed religious tolerance in having, as three of the overseers, his Protestant relatives - Sir Richard Knightley and Richard Fiennes, his brothers-in-law, and his nephew, Sir Thomas Lucy. He was buried at Somerton church and left £40 for the erection of an alabaster tomb which was inscribed with gold lettering and embellished with painted coats of arms. The Somerton Fermors continued as Catholics until the last male heir died in 1828.

Marriage is clearly a key factor in the Fermor story. In their early days it was probably marriage that added to their wealth, beginning with the marriage of Henry Richards alias Fermor to an Oxfordshire wool merchant. Thomas followed this by marrying the widow of Henry Wenman and then William Fermor had no fewer than four wives, at least two of whom were probably widows. Widows often brought substantial financial benefits to their new husbands, especially if there were no children from the previous marriage. Richard's marriage to Anne Brown also brought wealth to the family as she was eventually a coheir of her brother William, but the early significance of the marriage might have been in furthering

<sup>98</sup> Bindoff, p. 126.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.; PRO, PCC 30 Arundell.

Richard's business interests. Anne's father, Sir William Browne, was an established London merchant and it was her brother, William, who was one of Richard's partners in victualling the army in the Tournai campaign.

The marriages of the next generation are significant in what they reveal about the social standing of the family. This time the Fermors were probably the ones bringing wealth to the liaison, while in return they improved their social standing by marriage with several of the established local gentry and even nobility. Most notable matches were those of John Fermor, who married the daughter of Sir Nicholas Vaux (later Lord Vaux of Harrowden after his father's death), Mary who married Sir Richard Knightley, and Joane, who became the second wife of John, Lord Mordaunt.

William and Richard Fermor seem to have been an able pair and added to their wealth in a variety of ways; sheep farming and a legal career for William and as a Merchant of the Staple in Richard's case. It is easy to see why the Fermors were favoured by Henry VIII; their wealth put them in a position to provide cash loans at a time when royal finances were rather stretched. What is more difficult to understand is how they took their first steps from Oxfordshire to the national scene. Their rise seems to have begun towards the end of the reign of Henry VII; rather too late to benefit from any links with their neighbours the Lovells. Perhaps an obvious patron at this time would be Sir Richard Empson but apart from the fact that Richard Fermor was named as a juror at Empson's trial, there are no obvious links between the two families during this period. On the other hand, some years later both William and Richard Fermor seem to be well disposed towards Thomas Empson. Although they took advantage of Thomas' financial problems to purchase Easton Neston from him, the deal was reasonably favourable to Thomas, leaving him in possession for a peppercorn rent and then offering him the opportunity to buy back his property if he produced an heir. Later patrons of the Fermors could have included Cardinal Wolsey, who

Richard had dealings with, Thomas Cromwell, who seemed to favour William Fermor, and perhaps the Earl of Derby.

In the long term the Fermors were not handicapped because of their Catholicism, but for a time Richard certainly suffered a major setback. His fall from favour followed a familiar pattern as Henry VIII became increasingly concerned about unrest in the country. Even long standing and trusted friends fell under suspicion and Richard Fermor's apparent opposition to the King's rights and prerogatives made him an easy target for anyone jealous of his position. His setback proved to be fairly temporary, however, and most of Richard's property and possessions were eventually returned without the harsh financial penalties that sometimes accompanied this situation. His son John's Catholicism brought the family their first knighthood under Queen Mary.

Richard's success as a businessman was matched by his success as a father; he produced no fewer than ten children. The five girls all survived to make excellent marriages and broaden the family's sphere of influence, but at least two of the boys died young and the fate of a third is unknown. These deaths, however, were probably to the advantage of the family as a whole as it consolidated the wealth in the hands of the surviving sons, John and Thomas. The two brothers also benefited from the fact that their uncle William died without issue, as they inherited the whole of his estate as well as their father's property. The line established by Thomas seemed content to retire to Oxfordshire and enjoy their estate for another two centuries, but the main family line founded by the eldest brother, John, continued to be successful. In spite of maintaining their Catholic faith the family continued to enjoy royal favour and eventually reached the ranks of the nobility. Sir George's grandson was created a Baronet at the coronation of Charles I and his grandson in turn was created Earl of Portland in 1721.



## 5. THE KNIGHTLEY FAMILY

Although the Knightley family only established permanent residence at Fawsley, Northamptonshire, in the early part of the fifteenth century, they had a very ancient lineage and by the beginning of the sixteenth century were already described by Bindoff as the senior armorial family in the county.<sup>1</sup> The earliest Knightley that we know anything about was Rainald who was the lord of Chenistelei (Knightley) in Staffordshire under Earl Roger at the time of the Domesday Survey and the family descent can be traced from then until they died out in the twentieth century. The first connection with Northamptonshire came in the fourteenth century when a Richard Knightley married Ellen, the daughter and heir of Nicholas Chaunceux of Upton, near Northampton. At around the same time Richard's brother, William, exchanged his share of the family estate at Knightley with Roger de Peshall for land at Gnosall, Staffordshire (Roger was the husband of William's second cousin Joan who was heiress of the senior Knightley line).<sup>2</sup> The Upton Knightleys died out but the Northamptonshire connection was renewed when William's great, great, great grandson, Richard of Gnosall, purchased Fawsley in 1414/15 from Geoffrey Somerton, soon after his marriage to Elizabeth, the daughter of Thomas Purefoy of Drayton, Leicestershire.<sup>3</sup> In 1419/20 Richard I also renewed the family links with Upton

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<sup>1</sup> Bindoff, p. 478.

<sup>2</sup> Baker i, p. 381.

<sup>3</sup> *VCH Northants Families*, (ed.) O. Barron (London, 1906), p. 180.

and the hundred of Nobottle Grove when he purchased them from William Grendon, John Kydlington and Walter Clendon.<sup>4</sup>

The Knightleys were soon absorbed into the local gentry scene with Richard representing Northamptonshire as a Member of Parliament more than once during the reign of Henry VI. He added further to his Northamptonshire estate in 1440 by purchasing Hellidon from Sir John Baskerville. His son, another Richard, married well - his bride being Eleanor the daughter of Sir John Throckmorton of Coughton, Warwickshire. Although for many generations no Knightley had been knighted they were clearly seen as a marriageable family possessing, as they did, an ancient lineage and the wealth to purchase substantial estates. There is no firm evidence on the date of the marriage of Richard and Eleanor, but it probably took place in 1440 when Richard granted the manors of Burgh and Cowley to Sir John Throckmorton with reversion to his son, Richard II, after eight years. From this *Victoria County History* suggests that Richard II was only thirteen years old at the time of the marriage and would therefore be twenty one, and of age, in another eight years.<sup>5</sup> He was said to be ten years and more at the death of his father in 1442 but the above calculation would make him fifteen. Whatever his actual age he was still a minor but there is no indication of any problems arising from this minority. His mother and the Throckmortons presumably looked after his interests.

Richard Knightley II and Eleanor produced a large family consisting of four boys and five girls.<sup>6</sup> Little is known about the three youngest boys, John, James and Nicholas, but all were still alive in 1491 when Richard Knightley III acknowledged a debt of £108. 7s. 4d to his brothers and assigned payment out of Upton manor.<sup>7</sup> The girls all made respectable marriages into substantial local families with Emma, the youngest, marrying Thomas Andrew of Charwelton. The

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>6</sup> For Family Tree see Appendix 2e, p. 277.

<sup>7</sup> *VCH Northants Families*, p. 180.

Andrews and the Knightleys went on to have close business links for many years. The eldest son, Richard Knightley III, also made a good match in a financial sense by marrying Joan, the daughter and heir of Henry Skinerton of Alderton, through whom he acquired the manors of Alderton, Stoke Bruerne, Plumpton, Moreton Pinkney, Middleton Cheney and Great and Little Harrowden, together with land in several other places.<sup>8</sup>

Richard Knightley III became a lawyer at the Middle Temple and obviously had no strong affinity with any particular royal House but found favour with both sides. A comfortable position to be in and one which indicates the importance of influential, local gentry to succeeding monarchs. Richard was pricked as Sheriff for the county by Edward IV in 1475 and then by Henry VII in 1486 and was thought well enough of by Henry to be knighted in 1494 on the occasion of the King's second son, Henry, being created Duke of York.<sup>9</sup> He was pricked again as Sheriff in 1507 and for a last term by Henry VIII in 1510. He clearly continued to be involved in Court affairs as he was included in a list of people who were allowed livery cloth for the funeral of Henry VII.<sup>10</sup> He was appointed to Commissions of the Peace for Northamptonshire in 1509 and 1514, and in 1513 was one of the local men commissioned to seize the property of Scotsmen in England.<sup>11</sup> He continued to build up property around Fawsley as in 1511 he was given licence to sell the manors of Thorp, Buckby and Welton, which were worth 40 marks per annum, to Daventry Priory and to buy land from them in Fawsley to the value of £18 per annum.<sup>12</sup> He (or his son Richard) was nominated once again as Sheriff in 1523 but not pricked on that occasion.<sup>13</sup>

During Sir Richard's lifetime, apart from professional interests and the

<sup>8</sup> Baker, p. 379.

<sup>9</sup> Gairdner, *Letters and Papers*, vol. i, p. 390.

<sup>10</sup> LP 1, n. 20 (15).

<sup>11</sup> LP 1, n. 2222 (16).

<sup>12</sup> LP 1, n. 969 (24).

<sup>13</sup> LP 3, n. 3583.

income from a growing estate, the family wealth probably increased through involvement in the growing movement of enclosure and sheep farming. It is possible that the Knightleys had begun to move in this direction soon after taking residence at Fawsley as there is an early fifteenth-century reference to protests from demesne tenants there about imposed services which the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments thinks was the beginning of a deliberate policy of eviction in order to engage in sheep farming.<sup>14</sup> John Steane suggests that it was towards the latter part of the century that the Knightleys began to more systematically evict the tenants of Fawsley, as the subsidy returns of 1524 list only seven people paying tax and two of these were Knightleys themselves.<sup>15</sup> The village eventually became deserted with only one person plus two Knightleys listed in 1545,<sup>16</sup> and by 1547 the Knightleys grazed 2,500 sheep there.<sup>17</sup> At the same time the family also had 500 sheep at Upper Charwelton<sup>18</sup> alongside the 1200 kept there by Thomas Andrew and 300 by a third freeholder.<sup>19</sup> Upton, another village which belonged to the Knightleys, also seems to have become deserted towards the end of the fifteenth century, again probably for sheep farming.<sup>20</sup> In 1477 a rental of the village shows twenty four houses there, but in 1524 the subsidy returns only mention eighteen people. Later in the same year there are only ten people listed and by 1545 the only person mentioned is Sir Robert Stafford.<sup>21</sup>

Also during Sir Richard's lifetime the family built up their estate even further by purchases from local families. In the latter part of the fifteenth century

<sup>14</sup> RCHM *Northamptonshire* iii, p. 88; PRO C66/471m, 18d.

<sup>15</sup> J. Steane, *The Northamptonshire Landscape* (London, 1974), pp. 192-93; Subsidy returns, PRO E179/155/144. In a previous return for the same regnal year there had been eight people plus the two Knightleys. E179/155/122.

<sup>16</sup> PRO E179/156/222.

<sup>17</sup> RCHM *Northamptonshire* iii, p. 88.

<sup>18</sup> Where they had 300 acres of pasture - *IPM* 27 Hen VIII, n. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Steane, *Northamptonshire Landscape*, pp. 192-93.

<sup>20</sup> RCHM *Northamptonshire* v, p. 68.

<sup>21</sup> NRO, M154; PRO, E179/155/122, 144; E179/156/211.

he bought various parcels of land at Snorscomb in Everdon.<sup>22</sup> One contract was with Maud Wilcox when a mill in Gold Street, Northampton, was included in the sale.<sup>23</sup> By 1508 three quarters of the hamlet had already been enclosed, leaving only four houses, and Knightley converted another two hundred acres to pasture causing twenty eight people to leave.<sup>24</sup> Many of the Snorscomb negotiations were with the Colles family and seem to have been concerned with consolidating the Knightley estate. For example, in 1518, Sir Richard exchanged with Richard Colles some land at Preston Capes for land in Snorscomb.<sup>25</sup> Knightley also negotiated with Colles over land at Great and Little Preston.<sup>26</sup> In 1503 he had more dealings with the Andrews family when Thomas Andrew rented him land in Great and Little Charwelton, but some years later ownership was disputed between them.<sup>27</sup> Although their landed interests were spreading further afield, Knightley links with Fawsley itself were strengthened when, in 1518, Sir Richard had a window inserted in the church on behalf of his wife and himself and on his death a splendid tomb was erected.

There is a hint in Richard's will that some of his business dealings had been dubious when he says that any person "... provyng that I have inyured them wronged or takyn any goods of them against their will and right ... be made recompense and restitcion". Perhaps it was also a guilty conscience that made him direct his executors to cause many masses to be said and sung for his soul "... as hastilye as they can after my dep(ar)tur".<sup>28</sup>

Sir Richard Knightley III produced an even larger family than his father. He and Joan had eight boys and five girls and once again some of the marriages

<sup>22</sup> NRO, KLXXXX/1155-1162.

<sup>23</sup> NRO, KLXXXX/1153.

<sup>24</sup> D. Hall, *The Open Fields of Northamptonshire*, Northamptonshire Record Society vol xxxviii (Northampton, 1995), p. 21.

<sup>25</sup> NRO, K1.

<sup>26</sup> NRO, KXII/132.

<sup>27</sup> NRO, KLXXXVII/903-6.

<sup>28</sup> NRO, Northamptonshire and Rutland Wills, Book E, n. 118.

give an indication of the high status of the family in the locality. Both the eldest boy, Richard, and the eldest girl, Susan, married into the rising Spencer family of Althorp. Richard IV married Jane, the daughter of Sir John Spencer, and Susan married Jane's brother, the heir to the estate, Sir William Spencer. The third son, Edmund Knightley, made an even more advantageous marriage to Ursula, the daughter of Sir George Vere, sister and coheir of John, fourteenth Earl of Oxford, and widow of George Windsor, who was son and heir apparent of Andrew, first Baron Windsor. Thomas Knightley, the second son, married Joan Burnaby of Watford, heir to her father, and Valentine, the seventh son, married Anne, the daughter of Sir Edward Ferrers of Badesley Clinton, Warwickshire.

Although much of the property was entailed to male heirs, Sir Richard tried to make some provision for his family from his large estate of forty one manors; thirty three in Northamptonshire, one in Buckinghamshire, four in Warwickshire and three in Staffordshire. Richard, the eldest's, share of this disposable portion included four manors in Northamptonshire and it would seem that he had a base at Upton as he was recorded there in the 1524 subsidy returns as having goods there worth £40 for which he paid 40 shillings.<sup>29</sup> Richard actually drew up his will in 1528 and in it he left an estate worth £100 a year to his then unmarried son, Valentine, from land purchased since the marriage of his son Edmund. Edmund had had his share on his marriage, once again from land purchased in Richard's own lifetime. The actual purchased land was near to Fawsley itself and "... very comodiously and proffitable for my son Richard" and so it was thought right to settle Edmund further away by exchanging this land for land at Stoke Bruerne, Alderton and Shutlanger which had been part of the inheritance of Richard's wife Joan. A consolidated estate was particularly important for sheep farming as were the sheep themselves. Richard specified in his will that the sheep were not to be sold but had to go with the land itself for the advantage of his wife and eldest son.

<sup>29</sup> PRO, E179/155/122.

He also specified that if his wife did not want to occupy on her own behalf the land she received at Fawsley, Charwelton and Snorscombe, then her son Richard should have preferment in any lease. The descent of the entailed estate was carefully specified from Richard and his male heirs to Edmund (Thomas the second son had already died) and then to Valentine. Another son, John, who had possibly entered the church, only received a pension of £40 a year. Male heirs were allowed to set up jointures for life on their wives and to make any daughters a marriage settlement of 100 marks.

The concern of the Knightleys for maintaining their wealth and status is further indicated in the will of Richard III's wife, Joan, who left 100 marks to each of the four daughters of her daughter, Susan, but only if they married men approved of by their mother and if these men were worth £100 a year in their own right. The actual wealth of the family is also hinted at in the gilded and silver plate that Joan left to her son Edmund and daughter Susan. Valentine was much less favoured as he only got £100 and his wife a green walnut coffer with 20 nobles.<sup>30</sup>

Richard Knightley IV and his brother Edmund both followed their father's footsteps and trained as lawyers at the Middle Temple. Richard certainly practised there before inheriting the family estate as in the subsidy returns of 1523 he still had a chamber.<sup>31</sup> In 1511 Richard IV had been created a Justice of the Peace for Northamptonshire, a position he held for life, and he was included on all of the Commissions of the Peace during this time. In 1513 he was appointed, together with his brother Edmund, Thomas Isham and Edward Warner, to enquire into the important possessions of Edward, Earl of Wiltshire; Elizabeth, the wife of Thomas Cheyne; Constance, the wife of Thomas Parr; and Amy, the wife of Humphrey Brown; all of whom had been heirs of the Grene

<sup>30</sup>Northamptonshire & Rutland Wills, First series, Book G, part 2, n. 128.

<sup>31</sup>Bindoff, p. 478.

estate around Drayton and who were all now deceased.<sup>32</sup> Richard and Edmund were also both members of the Subsidy Commissions in 1523 and 1524.<sup>33</sup> In 1527 they were included on a Commission to Investigate the Hiding of Corn<sup>34</sup> and in 1530 they were on a Commission for Gaol Delivery.<sup>35</sup> In 1526 Richard was included in "Articles for running the Royal Household" as a Gentleman Usher "out of wages"<sup>36</sup> - another post he held for life. It is almost certain that he was one of the Members of Parliament for Northamptonshire in 1529 ( the slight doubt is because a tear has damaged the relevant manuscript and obscured the Christian name of the Knightley who was the Member of that Parliament).<sup>37</sup>

Richard and Edmund were obviously active in both Northamptonshire and further afield. They were involved in various disputes, some of which led to actual physical violence. One dispute in 1529 was with their brother-in-law, Sir William Spencer, over a contract with Elizabeth Vernon, allegedly broken by Spencer. Together with Sir Anthony Wingfield, the husband of Edmund's wife's elder sister, Richard and Edmund were attacked by Sir William Spencer as they left the *Horse's Head* in Cheapside. Edmund Knightley took his complaint to the Star Chamber and good relations were not restored until Spencer's death when the brothers went to the support of their sister Susan, Spencer's widow. Spencer's affairs were in disarray and she was threatened with destitution by creditors.<sup>38</sup>

Richard IV inherited the rest of the substantial Knightley estate in 1534 on the death of his father. Either then, or perhaps even earlier, he abandoned the law to live the life of a country gentleman, managing his estate and producing wool for export. He continued to hold a minor appointment at Court, to which he made occasional visits, but, in spite of the claims made on the family pedigree,

<sup>32</sup> LP 1, n. 2484 (34).

<sup>33</sup> LP 3, nos. 3282, 3504, 3583; LP 4, n. 547.

<sup>34</sup> LP 4, n. 3587.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., n. 6043.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., n. 1939.

<sup>37</sup> Bindoff, p. 478.

<sup>38</sup> VCH Northamptonshire Families, part 2, p. 97.



there is no evidence that he was ever knighted. He survived his father by less than four years and died in 1537/8, having produced five daughters but no sons. His daughters all made good marriages with Jane, the eldest, marrying George Lumley, the son and heir apparent of Baron Lumley. After George was beheaded, in 1537, Jane then married John Knottesford of Malvern, Worcester. Susan married Richard Langtree of Holcot while Anne had no less than three husbands. The first was George Throckmorton of Warwickshire, the second was Thomas Porter, also of Warwickshire, and the third was William Cecil. Mary married Bartholomew Hussey of Hampshire and Frances, the youngest, married James Duffield of Medmenham, Buckinghamshire. The *Inquisition Post Mortem* taken after Richard's death shows that the hundred of Fawsley had been granted from the King's hands, but there is no indication of when this took place.<sup>39</sup>

As the estate was in tail male, the bulk of it passed to Richard's next surviving brother Edmund. Edmund was another active and successful lawyer. His membership of various commissions in Northamptonshire has already been mentioned and he was a Justice of the Peace for the county from 1524 until his death. He also held wider reaching positions such as that of Attorney General for the Duchy of Lancaster from 1522-26.<sup>40</sup> As a result of this position, in 1528 he was one of a group who investigated the state of Grafton manor.<sup>41</sup> He had also clearly held other royal appointments, as in 1529 he was mentioned in the accounts of Catherine of Aragon as having received payment of £7. 6s. 8d. as an Apprentice-at-Law retained by Queen's Council.<sup>42</sup> In 1530 he was involved in a case of political significance when he helped two priests to search the muniments of Cardinal College, Oxford, to try to prove that Wolsey's endowment

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<sup>39</sup> Baker i, p. 255.

<sup>40</sup> Somerville i.

<sup>41</sup> *LP* 4, n. 2000.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 6121.

had been illegal.<sup>43</sup> Although not successful in this assignment, Edmund was created a Serjeant-at-Law in 1532.<sup>44</sup>

Alongside his legal positions, Edmund also served at least twice as a Member of Parliament, but never for Northamptonshire. In his first term in 1515 he represented Reading, where his election was unusual in that he had no landed connections with the area except very indirectly through his wife's first husband's father - Sir Andrew Windsor (Keeper of the Wardrobe) who did own property there. Even after his election Edmund made no attempt to establish himself locally. A few years earlier this would have been unremarkable as before 1504, Reading had often returned royal servants, but from then on it usually elected townsmen or men from the neighbourhood who were in the process of acquiring property in the town. Edmund's second term, in 1529, was as a member for Wilton, Wiltshire; a position he probably owed to the patronage of Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, who was a distant kinsman by marriage. He also had connections with Sir Thomas Englefield, a leading Berkshire gentleman and a fellow member of the Middle Temple, with whom Edmund was a feoffee of land in Wiltshire for Sir Thomas Tropenell. Englefield's father had been steward to the Countess. Edmund was probably also returned for Wilton in 1536 when the King asked for a general re-election of sitting Members, and could have been elected again in 1539, but the list of Members for this Parliament has been lost.<sup>45</sup>

Edmund's marriage to Ursula no doubt brought him social prestige, and probably money as well. Her brother died in 1524 and two years later Ursula and Edmund, together with Ursula's elder sister, Elizabeth and her husband Sir Anthony Wingfield, were involved in a dispute over the inheritance with their

<sup>43</sup> *LP* 4, n. 6579. Wolsey had obtained a papal bull, ratified by Henry VIII, to dissolve St. Frideswide's priory at Daventry and other lesser monasteries to fund the college to an extent not exceeding £2,000. After Wolsey's fall, Henry VIII continued with the college under his own name - Baker, i, pp. 315-6.

<sup>44</sup> Bindoff, p. 477.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 476.

second cousin who had inherited the entailed estate. They first petitioned Wolsey in 1526 in respect of land worth £2,260. They petitioned again in 1528, claiming that the new Earl, who only had permission to hold these lands until Wolsey had settled the dispute, had gone ahead and caused feoffments to be made.<sup>46</sup> Wolsey was dismissed before the case was settled and it went to arbitration. Eventually in 1529 an agreement was reached with Anne, the dowager Countess of Oxford.<sup>47</sup>

Other notable disputes followed, with the Knightleys even prepared to take on the Crown. The affair with the Spencers has already been mentioned briefly, but Edmund seems to have played the leading role as he was the one imprisoned in 1532, for trying to defraud the trustees of his sister's estate of certain movable property and for trying to deprive the King of the wardship of the heir. The Knightleys had challenged the Crown's feudal rights over the Spencer heir, who was a minor, by claiming that Sir William Spencer had never held land by knight service. Being an influential family, the Knightleys managed to get a local jury to swear to this and Edmund had a proclamation to this effect made in various towns in Warwickshire, Leicestershire and Northamptonshire "...in contempt of the King and his laws". For this offence he was committed to the Fleet.<sup>48</sup> After Edmund's imprisonment the King tried again to establish rights, with David Cecil, the Sheriff of Northamptonshire, setting up a new jury for the case to be heard by the Exchequer at Westminster. Unfortunately Cecil relied on Sir George Throckmorton, who was not only married to Richard Knightley's daughter Anne, but was himself an opponent of the King's policies in Parliament and was described to Cromwell as secretly working against the King.<sup>49</sup> Once again the Crown lost its case, but eventually Sir Thomas Audley intervened and sent the

<sup>46</sup> *LP* 4, n. 4588.

<sup>47</sup> Bindoff, p. 476.

<sup>48</sup> *LP* 5, n. 1298.

<sup>49</sup> *LP* 6, n. 128; Scarisbrick, 'Religion and Politics', p. 85.

Though it is worth noting that Throckmorton protested to Cromwell that he had done his best and that Cromwell should speak to him before believing his enemies. *LP* 5, n. 527.

case to Warwickshire under a writ of *supersedeas* which resulted in a Crown victory. Audley was afraid that if the King lost it would set "...an ill precedent and a great wrong to other shires".<sup>50</sup> Salt was rubbed into the Knightley wound when the custody of the Spencer lands was granted to the Copes of Canons Ashby.

Edmund Knightley was not without support, however. He petitioned Cromwell for release on his own behalf, saying that his brother and Sir John Russell had suggested that Cromwell would be his friend and claiming danger from plague.<sup>51</sup> The anti-papist Chief Justice of Common Pleas, Sir Robert Norwich, also supported him by writing to Cromwell beseeching a favour "...as he is one of our flock" (that is supportive of the King's religious policies).<sup>52</sup> Edmund was eventually released but went on to make such a fuss about his sister's problems and his own treatment that Sir William Spencer's executors told Cromwell that he should have been kept in prison.<sup>53</sup>

This was not Edmund Knightley's first brush with the law. There had been a case brought before Chancellor More, about 1530, in which it was claimed that Edmund had bought the manor of Foscore from an idiot to the disadvantage of the vendor's widowed mother. A few years later it seems as though he was prepared to go beyond even these dubiously legal boundaries, as it was claimed that he had usurped the rights of the heir of Shutford, near Banbury, Oxfordshire, who was a minor at the time, by forcibly entering the property and seizing the deeds.<sup>54</sup>

In his younger days Edmund had clearly been shown royal favour and attracted influential patronage, but his unscrupulous behaviour began to bring him enemies such as Sir William Parr, who in 1533 wrote to Cromwell to persuade him not to support Knightley as Sheriff - "...considering the grudges

<sup>50</sup> LP 5, n. 5118.

<sup>51</sup> LP 5, n. 1368.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., n. 1336.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., n. 1455.

<sup>54</sup> Bindoff, p. 477.

borne to me by the Knightleys it would be small comfort to me if any of them next year were sheriff of Northamptonshire".<sup>55</sup> Sir William seems to have had some influence as he was himself Sheriff the following year and it was more than twenty years before another Knightley was Sheriff in 1554.

The Knightley family were obviously aware of the importance of being favoured by people of influence and actively tried to promote their own interests. Edmund's mother, Joan, sent Cromwell a horse and offered him the mastership of the game in her park. She also complained that deer were destroyed in the park because people said that she had not got the King's confirmation for it.<sup>56</sup> Edmund himself tried to curry favour in 1535 by making public his examination of a tailor at Blisworth who had spoken against the King by saying that he wanted "... to see the King's head run upon the ground like a football".<sup>57</sup> Edmund clearly still had Thomas Audley's support, as in 1537 he recommended Edmund to Cromwell as a judge on the grounds that he was a "...man of great possessions" who

needeth not to extort, and though he be wilful and full of fond inventions, yet it is to be thought if ever he will be an honest man that now he hath these great possessions and may have the estimation of a judge, he will leave all his own fancies and become a new man.<sup>58</sup>

Cromwell had his own opinion, however, and Edmund remained only a magistrate, even though Cromwell himself had written favourably about him to the Abbot of Evesham earlier that year.<sup>59</sup>

It has been suggested that Edmund's fall from favour might also have been linked to his relationship with George Lumley, who was married to his niece, Jane, and who was executed in 1538 for his part in the Pilgrimage of

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<sup>55</sup> *LP* 6, n. 1337.

<sup>56</sup> *LP* 10, n. 606.

<sup>57</sup> Bindoff, p. 477.

<sup>58</sup> *LP* 12, n. 805.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 620.

Grace.<sup>60</sup> Professor Scarisbrick suggests that if the rebellion had spread to Northamptonshire, then Edmund Knightley could have been one of its leaders; partly because of his own disaffection in relation to the Spencer custody case, and partly because of his connections with a group who formed one of the factions, so common in Tudor politics.<sup>61</sup> Scarisbrick uses Sir William Parr's letter to Cromwell as evidence for an identifiable group. Parr links Edmund with Sir William Newnham, the Andrews family, Thomas Lovet and John Barnard.<sup>62</sup> Edmund also had business links with Lord Darcy, the leading aristocrat in the Pilgrimage of Grace. In the event, several members of this group, including Edmund, were the very people to whom the King turned for support. This was perhaps given rather grudgingly as in October 1536 they wrote to Cromwell to complain that they had been asked to raise 30,000 men at Northampton but had not been told when, or for how long.<sup>63</sup>

Edmund's own attitude to the Reformation seems to have been ambivalent, at least at first. In 1536 he must have been seen as someone favourably disposed to the Crown's viewpoint when he was appointed as a commissioner for the suppression of religious houses, along with George Gifford, a relative by marriage, John Lane, one of Edmund's clients, and Robert Burgoyne. In fact the group were impressed by what they found and in a letter to Cromwell, in May 1536, they recommended that pity should be shown to Catesby Nunnery and that St James's Abbey, Northampton, should continue as the Abbot was a godly man, loved by all and the buildings were in good repair. The King was less than pleased by this response and suggested that they had been bribed to make this suggestion.<sup>64</sup> Two months later the Abbot was dead and both Edmund Knightley and Gifford were sufficient realists to recognise that

<sup>60</sup> Bindoff, p. 477.

<sup>61</sup> Scarisbrick, 'Religion and Politics', pp. 86-87.

<sup>62</sup> *LP* 6, n. 1337.

<sup>63</sup> *LP* 11, n. 931.

<sup>64</sup> *VCH Northants* ii, p. 124.

suppression was inevitable and to want to acquire the property for themselves. Gifford offered Cromwell a bribe of £20 to take over the farm, which was worth £14 a year, saying that he feared "... no man's labour to strive and obtain the farm, save his colleague serjeant Edmund Knightley".<sup>65</sup> The house had a respite of two years as the canons offered a fine of £333. 6s. 8d, but it was finally suppressed in 1538 and went to Gifford.

Meanwhile Edmund had been granted the lease of Chacombe rectory,<sup>66</sup> and also the site of Studley Priory in Warwickshire together with rents worth £8 2s. 2d.<sup>67</sup> More importantly, in 1542 he was granted the manors of Badby and Newnham, Northamptonshire, which had belonged to Evesham Abbey. A valuation taken in 1541 at the dissolution of the Abbey shows just how valuable such gifts were -

	Badby			Newnham		
	£	s	d	£	s	d
Rents of assize		16	6 1/2	1	13	5 1/2
Rents from customary tenants	7	5	6 1/2	10	8	5
Rents from tenants at will	10	0	0	10	0	0
Sale of work due from tenants	11	13	6	11	18	3 1/2
Rents called Frithe Silver		12	0		16	0
Farm of Demesne lands	3	16	0			
Farm of Windmill	1	13	4			
Farm of Watermill				1	10	0
Farm of tithes and grain	9	6	8	18	0	0
Farm of wood	6	3	4			
Profits of courts	5	10	0			
	56	18	11	54	6	2

<sup>68</sup>

When Edmund inherited from his brother, in 1537, his own property was combined with the family estates to make him a very wealthy man. His problems

<sup>65</sup> *LP* 11, n. 87.

<sup>66</sup> *LP* 13, n. 1520 (1076).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, n. 249 (10).

<sup>68</sup> *CPR* 34 Hen 8, p. 1.

were not over, however, as he was soon involved in a dispute with his own mother and Jane Knightley, his brother's widow. Jane appealed to Cromwell for help, claiming that Edmund was not keeping to the terms of her husband's will and was keeping rents to himself.<sup>69</sup> The dispute clearly dragged on for a long time, as in 1540 Edmund was making excuses to Cromwell for not going to see him in London to discuss the matter because his wife was ill and in great danger, but claiming that the affair was now settled.<sup>70</sup>

A further dispute soon arose with Jane's new husband, Sir Robert Stafford. Sir Robert claimed that Richard Knightley IV had been promised £1,000 by his father when he married Jane, and he also claimed timber in Farthingstone wood on Jane's behalf, forcing Edmund to sue him for breaking an injunction against trespass in 1541. Which party had right on their side is not clear, but Edmund acquired a reputation for sharp practice which was strengthened by the affair with the Wakes. Thomas Wake claimed that when his father had sold Blisworth manor to Sir Richard Knightley III, for 420 marks, it was on the understanding that it would be returned if the purchase money was repaid within twelve years.<sup>71</sup> Thomas alleged that Edmund had frustrated this possibility by procuring his arrest for debt, while at the same time Richard Knightley IV had extorted a surrender of the title in return for his release.

Whatever Edmund's relationship with his family and neighbours, however, soon after these events royal favour seems to have been restored, as in 1540 he was one of a contingent who greeted Anne of Cleves.<sup>72</sup> By 1541 he had been knighted and in the same year he was nominated as Sheriff, even though he was not pricked. He clearly set out to consolidate his position at Fawsley, as between 1537, when he inherited the estate, and 1542, he was probably responsible for building the great hall at Fawsley. It seems as though improvement in the

<sup>69</sup> *LP* 13, n. 544.

<sup>70</sup> *LP* 15, n. 586.

<sup>71</sup> NRO, ASL 1268.

<sup>72</sup> *LP* 14, n. 572.



property was desirable, as Leland commented in 1538 that "Mr Knightley, a man of great lands, hath his principal house at Faulleslie, but it is no very sumptuous thing".<sup>73</sup> Also in 1542, Edmund engaged in property exchange with the King, which brought him various manors in Northamptonshire and elsewhere and a cash sum of £99.<sup>74</sup> He died later that same year and was buried at Fawsley. None of his six daughters survived him and the entailed estate passed to yet another brother - Valentine Knightley. The succession of three brothers as owners of the Knightley estate brought back together much of the property that had been shared out by their father's settlement in 1520, and left Valentine in a very strong financial position.

Less is known about Valentine than about his brothers as he seems to have taken little part in public affairs, but he was sufficiently in receipt of royal favour to be knighted in 1546, after the coronation of Edward VI. He and his wife Anne, the daughter of Sir Edward Ferrers, rescued the family line by producing a large family of five boys (of which four survived to adulthood and marriage) and two girls. Valentine's quieter lifestyle may have accounted for the less spectacular marriages made by his children as compared with his own generation of Knightleys, or with the children of his brother Richard. With their first marriages none of his sons or daughters even married into knightly families, but the eldest boy, Richard, probably added to the family wealth as his first bride was Mary Fermor, daughter of Richard Fermor of Easton Neston, a successful and wealthy newcomer to the gentry community of Northamptonshire. Sir Valentine made a belated appearance on the public scene when he was pricked as Sheriff for the county in 1554; the first Knightley to hold the office for twenty years. In 1558 Sir Valentine was given licence to sell the manors of Hardwick and Marston to Sir John Spencer and others, but in the light of the family wealth at this time, it is difficult to see this as the beginning of the break up of the estate;

<sup>73</sup>Leland *itinerary*, pts. i - iii, p. 10.

<sup>74</sup>Bindoff, p. 478.

more likely it was just routine business. Sir Valentine died in 1566 and his son, Richard, succeeded to an estate valued at £13,000 a year.<sup>75</sup>

Richard Knightley V seems to have moved in more influential circles than his father as he was a friend of the Earl of Leicester and was knighted by him at Fotheringhay in 1566. In his younger days he apparently became involved in various escapades as he was fined for felony in 1560, 1561, 1565, 1566 and 1568.<sup>76</sup> (It is not clear whether these are different fines or whether it took eight years to pay off the first fine). When his first wife died, in 1573, he married Elizabeth, the youngest daughter of Edward Seymour, first Duke of Somerset and Protector of King Edward VI. On more than one occasion Sir Richard was Sheriff for Northamptonshire and a Member of Parliament for both town and county, but he eventually turned his back on court and public life and became an ardent and leading puritan. The family line continued until the twentieth century, but several times succession was indirect and the gradual sale of property suggests a steady decline in fortune. A brief revival from the late eighteenth century brought them a baronetcy, in 1898, and finally a peerage when Sir Rainald was created Lord Knightley of Fawsley in 1892. It was a short lived honour as Rainald had no children and the Knightley line itself died out completely in 1938 with the death of Rainald's cousin, the Rev. Sir Henry Knightley.

The Knightleys are an example of a family who advanced in fortune by almost all possible means during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Their early wealth came from their extensive estates which were added to by marriages to rich women. They used their legal skill to further their situation, sometimes by very dubious means. From an early stage they were involved in the lucrative pastime of sheep farming, ruthlessly discouraging and evicting tenants to create the appropriate physical environment. On the local scene they were a force to be

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<sup>75</sup> DNB

<sup>76</sup> NRO, NPL 217.

reckoned with as they intermarried with many other powerful families. This local influence was enough for them to be favoured in a small way by both Yorkist and Lancastrian kings during the second half of the fifteenth century; without the risks that closer political involvement could bring. It was not until the sixteenth century that they really moved beyond Northamptonshire. Edward Knightley's appointment as Attorney General for the Duchy of Lancaster in 1522, and his brother, Richard's, attachment to the royal household, were indicative of their rising status. This was confirmed by Edmund's marriage to the sister of John, Earl of Oxford. The brothers' general ruthlessness, and their challenge to royal authority in the Spencer wardship affair, brought them setbacks in the 1530s, but with the support of powerful patrons they recovered sufficient favour and trust for Edmund to be appointed as a Commissioner for the Suppression of Religious Houses and he profited in at least a small way from the Dissolution. They had mixed dynastic fortunes, but the failure of some Knightleys to produce male heirs was more than compensated for by others producing an abundance. The entailment of the family estate to male heirs, and the consequent inheritance by a succession of three brothers in the sixteenth century, did much to consolidate the estate and create a solid foundation for future generations.

## 6. SUPPLEMENTARY FAMILIES

### The Catesby Family

The Catesbys were a family of ancient lineage, possibly even tracing their line back to the Essebys of Ashby St Ledgers.<sup>1</sup> The manor of Ashby was acquired by the Catesbys in the latter part of the fourteenth century through the marriage of John Catesby to Emma, the daughter and heir of Robert de Cranford, but they already owned various other Northamptonshire manors. They had for a long time owned land in Warwickshire at Radbourne, Ladbrooke and Shuckburgh, and John's son, John Catesby II, added to this through his marriage to Margaret, the daughter and coheir of William Montfort, an influential Leicestershire figure. These marriages indicate a degree of social standing as does the fact that they held local offices in Northamptonshire, Warwickshire and elsewhere. John Catesby II seems to have been a lawyer, a profession followed very successfully by succeeding generations. Towards the end of the reign of Richard II he was steward to the powerful Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick and attorney general for his affairs.<sup>2</sup> John and Margaret probably had four sons - William, Robert, John and Edmond.<sup>3</sup>

William Catesby I was knighted, probably in 1453 when he sat in Parliament as a Knight of the Shire for Northamptonshire.<sup>4</sup> He married twice but

<sup>1</sup> W. Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, ii (London, 1730), p. 787.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 788.

<sup>3</sup> For Family Tree see Appendix 2f, p. 278.

<sup>4</sup> Wedgwood, p. 164.

there is some dispute as to which wife came first. One wife was Philippa, a daughter and coheir of Sir William Bishopston, and they had a son, William, and three daughters. The other wife was Joan, widow of Humphrey de la Bere and daughter of Sir Thomas Barre and his wife Alice (who was sister to John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury). William moved in influential circles as indicated by his position of trustee in the marriage settlement of the Duke of Buckingham's son John in 1458.<sup>5</sup> He was three times Sheriff of Northamptonshire, in 1442, 1451 and 1455, and held the same office for Herefordshire on two occasions. He was Sheriff for Northamptonshire again in 1470 but ordered to give up the office to Ralph Hastings esquire, brother of William, Lord Hastings, presumably because of his Lancastrian connections.<sup>6</sup> He was a Justice of the Peace for Northamptonshire and Warwickshire and had custody of Northampton Castle under Henry VI. He was clearly a trusted Lancastrian who even went briefly into exile with Henry VI, and was sufficiently close to the Queen to benefit from the confiscation of lands in 1459. William was alert to the political situation, however, and seems to have made a deliberate attempt to keep his options open by maintaining a relationship with two known Yorkists, Thomas Hungerford and Baldwin Mountford, who witnessed a deed for him.<sup>7</sup> With the success of the Yorkists in 1460, his own lands were seized because of his support of Henry VI, but a royal pardon was secured for him from Edward IV by his mother and Lord Stanley.<sup>8</sup> He was at first removed from the Bench under the Yorkists but later forgiven and reinstated in 1465. The Readeption government of Henry VI still saw him as one of theirs, however, and appointed him Sheriff, but after 1471, with Edward IV more securely on the throne, Catesby seems to have transferred his allegiance and become a retainer of Lord Hastings, Edward's loyal supporter. As such he was a sought after associate and annuities and other rewards began

<sup>5</sup> NRO, SS 4254.

<sup>6</sup> *CFR 1471-1485*, n. 42.

<sup>7</sup> C. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 480.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 492-93.

to accrue.<sup>9</sup> He died in 1479 and was succeeded by his son William Catesby II.<sup>10</sup>

William Catesby II was also a very able lawyer who soon began to build a reputation for himself. Probably as a result of his father's influence, he became legal adviser to Elizabeth, Lady Latimer, daughter and coheir of the Earl of Warwick. This may have broadened his social connections and been a factor in his marriage to Margaret, daughter of Lord Zouche of Harringworth; an influential man in both Leicestershire and Northamptonshire. His family circle extended even further in social terms when his wife's mother remarried John, Lord Scrope of Bolton. William steadily acquired offices and the stewardships of estates and also began to purchase land in his own right.<sup>11</sup> From being a protégé of William, Lord Hastings, he became one of his most trusted servants and deputised for him in administering Leicestershire. His connections with Hastings presumably brought him to the notice of Edward IV and in 1481 he was appointed Apprentice-at-Law to the Duchy of Lancaster. His ability soon attracted the attention of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who in his role of Lord Protector, appointed William to be his Chancellor of the Earldom of March.

This association with Richard III was to be his downfall as William Catesby is reputed to have been used by Richard to sound out Hastings over his intended usurpation of the throne. According to most sources Hastings reacted strongly against the idea and Catesby, fearing for his own position, influenced Richard against Hastings by suggesting that he was involved in a plot with the Queen. Catesby certainly profited from the fall of Hastings as he obtained some of his offices; Chamberlain of the Exchequer and Steward of Higham Ferrers and Daventry within the Duchy of Lancaster. His own position of Chancellor of the Earldom of March was confirmed for life and he was made Chancellor of the

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 528.

<sup>10</sup> Wedgewood points out that *DNB* wrongly gives his death as being in 1470.

<sup>11</sup> For details of his progress see D.T. Williams' article, 'The Hastily Drawn up Will of William Catesby, Esquire', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, no. 51 (1975-6), pp.43-51.

Exchequer and a Squire of the King's Body. High honours indeed for a mere esquire! He was probably elected to Richard's first Parliament and was certainly Speaker in 1484. Although he gained a great deal from royal favour others gained more. He was granted land worth £273 a year by Richard III but his compatriots in the rhyme "the Cat, the Rat and Lovel our Dog, Rule all England under a Hog" did better with Lovel getting £400 a year and Ratcliffe £666.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of their legal activities, both William Catesby and his father retained an active interest in their estate which undoubtedly added to their income. They operated an unusual degree of specialisation, keeping a home farm at Ashby, while Radbourne, a depopulated village, was given over to pasture for animal husbandry. They kept a large breeding flock of sheep and the scale of their operation can be judged by their expenditure on enclosure, a sheephouse, and tar and pitch to stop foot rot. Ladbroke, meanwhile, provided venison, rabbits, swans and fish. Before 1460 the profits from Radbourne wool were between £20 and £50 a year and were sent directly to Sir William Catesby or his wife who also took an active part in managing the estate. After 1460 they expanded into cattle and kept sheep for meat as well as wool.<sup>13</sup>

Other members of the Catesby family had also done well; seemingly on their own merits. There were several Johns in the family and it is difficult to distinguish them from each other as sources vary in their interpretation of the evidence. It is probable that it was the half brother of William Catesby II who inherited Althorp on the death of his uncle, John of Althorp, who was said to die a bachelor.<sup>14</sup> The John Catesby who is described as being from Whiston, had a large family of seven sons and two daughters.<sup>15</sup> John of Whiston was probably the son of Edmund (or Edward), brother to William Catesby I and John of Althorp.

<sup>12</sup> Wedgewood, p. 165.

<sup>13</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 191-93.

<sup>14</sup> D.T. Williams, 'The Restoration of a Family to Fortune, Grace and Favour', in *Early Tudor England. Proceedings of the 1986 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge, 1987), p. 214.

<sup>15</sup> DNB.

It was John of Whiston who was called to Parliament in 1469 as a King's Serjeant and in 1481 made a Justice of Common Pleas. Probably in the next year he was knighted and he continued as a Justice through the reign of Richard III. On the accession of Henry VII his reappointment was delayed by a month, probably because of the attainder of his cousin, William Catesby, but he survived this setback and the Whiston Catesbys continued to flourish. Sir John was succeeded in 1486/7 by his son, Humphrey, who died in 1503/4 and was succeeded in turn by his son Anthony. The family clearly continued in the legal profession as Anthony was made a Serjeant-at-Law. There is some suggestion of financial problems in Humphrey's will; certainly a shortage of ready cash as his executors were instructed to sell some land and a gold chain to raise £200 to be shared between his two daughters.<sup>16</sup> This situation must have improved, however, as Anthony was wealthy enough to build a new church at Whiston, the last of the perpendicular style to be built in Northamptonshire and a particularly fine example of the period.

John Catesby of Althorp is often described as a Serjeant-at-Law and sometimes credited with a knighthood but in both instances may be being confused with his nephew of Whiston. John of Althorp remains a shadowy character; his main claim to fame is that he was once the owner of Althorp. The inheritance of Althorp shows possible dissent within the Catesby family with both the son and half brother of William II laying claim to the estate. Later evidence makes it seem likely that John of Althorp had actually sold Althorp to his nephew, William II, but because of William's attainder, his son, John, did not want to admit this as it would have meant Althorp being confiscated by the Crown. Instead he tried to claim the estate on his own account on the grounds that it had been promised to him at his birth, which had actually taken place at Althorp. His claim was rejected and Althorp awarded to his uncle John, who claimed that the estate

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<sup>16</sup> PRO, PCC 23 Holgrave.



had actually been bequeathed to him by John of Althorp. There remain serious doubts about the authenticity of this will, however, and in 1506, after the death of George Catesby, eldest son and heir of William II, an attempt was made to recover Althorp by the senior Catesby line; probably instigated by George Catesby's father-in-law, Richard Empson. This was again unsuccessful and Althorp was later bought by the Spencer family.<sup>17</sup> It was possibly John of Althorp who was shown royal favour in being granted the wardship of the wealthy heir to the Grene estate at Drayton, Edward, Earl of Wiltshire. He sold the marriage of Edward to Oliver Sutton and others for £131. 13s. 8d.<sup>18</sup>

As well as the immediate court cases described above, the execution and attainder of William Catesby brought the Ashby St Ledger Catesbys long lasting problems. In similar circumstances an attainder had often been reversed and an heir restored to his estates and it was probably this hope that led Sir Richard Empson to marry his daughter, Elizabeth, to William Catesby's heir George. In this he was given encouragement and financial backing by his nephew, John Spencer, who loaned 200 marks to pay a fee to the Crown for the restitution of the Catesby lands. George Catesby did eventually get back most of the family lands, but the conditions of the reversal of the attainder had been punitive and the process of buying out the entailed possessions from the people they had been granted to in 1485 left George in a poor financial position. An indication of his problems can be seen in his sale of the marriage of his daughter, Audrey, to the Newnham family who were not yet at the same social level.<sup>19</sup> Family pride was important, however, and on the death of George a canopied brass was erected in the church at Ashby in memory of his father and mother together with another brass, probably to George himself.

<sup>17</sup> This case is described in detail in E.W. Ives, *The Common Lawyers of Pre-Reformation England* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 111-114, as an example of how a lawyer, Thomas Kebell, possibly acquiesced in fraud for the benefit of former clients.

<sup>18</sup> Campbell, *Materials*, p. 239.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, 'Restoration', *Early Tudor England*, p. 216.

George Catesby died in 1505 while his son William III was still a minor, but fortunately his widow, Elizabeth, quickly married Thomas Lucy, a rising Warwickshire squire, who was able to obtain the wardship of the young William.<sup>20</sup> A few years later the family had one of their rare strokes of good fortune when in 1512 one of the men who had been granted forfeited Catesby land, Sir John Risely, died without issue and the estates reverted to the heir of George Catesby. Unfortunately this upturn in luck did not last long, as in 1517 William died before attaining his majority and the estate passed to his brother Richard, who was only twelve years old. Sir Thomas Lucy wanted to take on this wardship in turn, but this time the wealthy Sir John Spencer was successful. Sir John was able to exploit the Catesby lands for the next eleven years and married Richard to his daughter, Dorothy. A gain to the Spencers as it brought the Catesby lineage into the family, but for the Catesby family it was yet another marriage of lower social status.<sup>21</sup>

To all appearances, Richard Catesby was a success story. He was a substantial landowner and was later knighted by Henry VIII. His position as a leader of Northamptonshire society was recognised by appointment as Sheriff of the county in 1542 and 1550 and also of Leicestershire and Warwickshire. He was made a Justice of the Peace, served on many commissions and presided over the Royal Commission upon Enclosures for the Midlands.<sup>22</sup> He was elected as a Member of Parliament for Warwickshire in 1539 and 1553 and, as a further indication of royal favour having been restored, he was one of the esquires in the party to welcome Anne of Cleves. His service to the Crown was to be even more active when he took personal command of his tenants in the rearguard during Henry VIII's campaign in France in 1544.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of all of this his rewards were to be very limited. He was not one of

<sup>20</sup> *LP* 1, n. 190.

<sup>21</sup> Williams, 'Restoration', *Early Tudor England*, p. 216; *LP* 2, n. 1489.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

the many men to benefit from the Dissolution of the monasteries either by grants or permission to purchase the lands which came onto the market. Probably his problem was exacerbated by lack of ready money as he had financial commitments on many fronts. His mother survived to a ripe old age, living in the family home at Ashby St Ledger, and Richard was burdened with the payments due for her dower. On his own account he married three times and produced no less than twelve children who all needed providing for, and although he was the owner of extensive estates, the cost of recovering them meant that most of the land was let and it was the tenants who were able to profit from the sheep who were reared there.

From the time that Richard entered into his inheritance there are the "...tell-tale signs of the financial difficulties of 'decaying gentility'".<sup>24</sup> He was forced to sell off ancestral lands or enter into long leases which, at a time of rising inflation, could not be beneficial to the landlord, and most of his daughters married into families of inferior social status. The death of Sir Richard's son, William IV, before his father was a further blow to the family. When Richard died in 1553, the estate passed to his grandson, William V, which meant another long period of wardship under the control of the Crown, and in 1554 William's marriage was granted to the Roman Catholic Sir Robert Throckmorton, eldest brother of Anthony Throckmorton who had married William Catesby's mother. Sir Robert married William to his daughter Anne, not a disadvantageous match in itself as the Throckmortons themselves had a long pedigree and were a leading Warwickshire family, but a liaison which was eventually to prove fatal to the Catesbys in the next century.

Legal skill was clearly the foundation on which Catesby success was built. This brought them into contact with important potential patrons. Their increasing wealth and established family pedigree also made them attractive in the

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

marriage market. This was particularly apparent with the children of Sir William Catesby I when his son, William II, married the daughter of Lord Zouche and one of his daughters married Lord John Grey, Marquis of Dorset. Both matches were steps up the ladder of social status. After William II's execution in 1485 they never again reached the same position and there is evidence of a slow decline. Links with the Empsons and the Spencers might look like advantageous connections, but both marriages took place when these families were still rising to the positions that they later held. They were using the Catesby name to provide them with the respectability of ancient lineage rather than the match being a Catesby gain.

Physiological problems were less acute than for many families. They came in the form of premature death rather than failure to produce heirs. In fact at times too many children was the problem rather than too few. Wardship brought its own potential dangers to a family estate, but while the Catesbys did not escape unscathed, the consequences were not as drastic as they could have been.

The Catesbys are a good example of the potential rewards of royal favour and the possible disaster of backing the wrong side. One could say, however, that William Catesby was particularly unlucky in suffering to the extent that he did. Other men in similar circumstances have fared better, and with his Lancastrian background one might have expected Henry VII to show more mercy to him, or greater forgiveness to his family. How far his fate was the result of Henry's own feelings and how far it reflects the enmity of Henry's advisers can only be surmised. William seems to have aroused particular hatred through his suspected involvement in the death of Lord Hastings, but even that was not unusual action for the time. Perhaps he had built up longer standing enemies with his own business dealings. As Dr Williams' suggests when discussing Catesby's estate -

Such an impressive and strategic grouping of estates could not have been acquired within such a short period of time without resorting to elements of sharp practice and, indeed, the exertion of strong coercive pressures upon individuals and corporations.<sup>25</sup>

Sir Richard Empson's fate some years later, bears witness to the dangers of making enemies of men of influence. It is even possible that Empson himself was one of these enemies as William Catesby's rapid rise under Richard III coincided with Empson being removed from the desirable position of Attorney General to the Duchy of Lancaster. A case of jealousy towards a potential rival being repaid?

In the long run it was financial trouble that was to prove the most insidious factor in family decline. George Catesby and his son Richard made great efforts and to a large extent recovered family estates and status, but they were fighting a losing battle on the financial front. The harsh terms imposed for the reversal of William II's attainder proved too great a burden, especially as they were never alleviated by any tangible rewards even when the family had struggled back to apparent royal favour.

### **The Tresham Family**

The Tresham story goes back to the early part of the fifteenth century when the many terms served by William Tresham I between 1423 and 1450 as a Knight of the Shire for Northamptonshire, give an indication of the local social standing already achieved by the family.<sup>26</sup> William first appeared in Northampton in 1411 when he acted as security for the grantees of the custody of a meadow in Northampton fields,<sup>27</sup> but the circumstances of the family's emergence in the county are unknown. William seems to have been a trained lawyer and probably at first made his living from private practice in the county. At some stage,

<sup>25</sup> Williams, 'The Hastily Drawn Up Will', *Trans. Leics. Arch. Soc.*, 51 p. 46.

<sup>26</sup> He was elected to twelve of the sixteen Parliaments held during this period.

<sup>27</sup> J.S. Roskell, 'William Tresham of Sywell, Speaker for the Commons under Henry VI', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, vol. II, no. 4 (1957), p. 191.

however, he began to be involved in royal administration - a move which suggests influential patronage. Lord Grey of Ruthin would seem to be an obvious candidate but there is no evidence to make a definite link.

As early as 1415, William Tresham was showing signs of royal favour with his appointment as auditor of the royal accounts in South Wales and the grant of a share in the wardship of the heir to the Tyndale estate in the county.<sup>28</sup> Further wardships were to follow and confirmation of favour can be seen in his other appointments. In 1442 he was promised the next vacancy of the office of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (a post he came into in February 1449) and in November 1443 he and his son, Thomas I, were appointed to share for life the stewardship of the Duchy estates in Northamptonshire, Huntingdon, Bedford and Buckingham, excepting those belonging to the Honour of Leicester in Northamptonshire.<sup>29</sup> One of his rewards for service was to be among those granted the revenues of alien priories in England in 1440 and he was also granted other annuities such as £40 from the royal manor of Kingscliffe and £40 from the Receiver-General for the Duchy of Lancaster, both in conjunction with his son Thomas.<sup>30</sup> He was appointed a Justice of the Peace for Northamptonshire from 1439 until his death, and his four terms as Speaker of the House of Commons suggests a considerable degree of royal trust at a time when the Crown was under pressure. This position was almost considered a Court appointment.

The family originally held the manor of Sywell and in 1438 William bought the manor of Westhall in Rushton and the advowson of the church there.<sup>31</sup> In 1441 he was granted free warren in both of these manors and in the manor of Harrington. By the time of his death he had accumulated a large estate scattered

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. This was shared with Ralph Grene and William Aldwinckle.

<sup>29</sup> J.S. Roskell, 'Sir Thomas Tresham, Knight and Speaker for the Commons under Henry VI', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, vol. II, no. 6 (1959), p. 313.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>31</sup> Finch, p. 67. Wedgwood incorrectly calls the place Rushden which is a different Northamptonshire town.

across twenty-five different manors, mostly in Northamptonshire but with some property in Leicestershire and Buckinghamshire.<sup>32</sup> He married Isabel, the daughter of William Vaux, another Northampton lawyer, who was also a fellow Member of Parliament. The couple had ~~at~~ two sons, Thomas and Henry, and a daughter, Alice.

In spite of the favour shown to him by Henry VI, William apparently took the side of the Duke of York in the growing troubles of the late 1440s. As Speaker of the House he took a leading part in the impeachment of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, and in February 1450 presented the formal indictment against Suffolk to the House of Lords. Roskell, however, suggests that it would be unfair to assume too much from this in relation to Tresham's political sympathies. As Speaker he had a part to play, but his continuing personal acceptability to the Crown is indicated by his retention of the Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster.<sup>33</sup> Even his ill fated attempt to rendezvous with the Duke of York in 1450 can be construed in different ways. When the Duke of York crossed from Ireland in August of that year William Tresham set out from Sywell to meet him, but was waylaid at Thorplands, near Moulton, and killed.

It is commonly believed that the attackers were retainers of the Lancastrian Lord Grey of <sup>Rochester</sup> ~~of~~, but in spite of his wife's petition for justice no action was ever taken against Lord Grey or his men. It is usually assumed that William was meeting the Duke of York to offer support but Roskell puts a different interpretation on his actions. He points out that the Treshams owed everything to their membership of the Court party and suggests that they were merely seeking insurance for their political future, or even that their attendance had been demanded by York as Tresham was one of his feoffees. It is clear that the intended meeting had been initiated by the Duke and not by Tresham.<sup>34</sup> Some

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Roskell, 'William Tresham', *Northants. P & P*, II no. 4, p. 198.

<sup>34</sup> Roskell, 'Sir Thomas Tresham', *Northants P & P*, II no. 6, p. 315.

credence must be given to Roskell's viewpoint in the light of the fact that William's son, Thomas, was also injured in the attack, and his Lancastrian sympathies have never been in doubt. On the other hand William's second son, Henry, had married Alice, the daughter of Thomas Mulsho of Geddington who was a servant of the Duke of York.

Thomas Tresham I had been brought up from childhood in the household of Henry VI, first as an Squire of the King's Hall and later as an Usher of the King's Chamber.<sup>35</sup> His first appearances in Parliament were for Buckinghamshire, in 1447, and Huntingdonshire, in 1449 and 1449-50. No doubt his father's influence as Speaker and his own position in the royal household helped to get him elected. His first official position in his home county came in 1448 when he was appointed as Escheator for Northamptonshire and Rutland. After his father's death there was an opening for parliamentary representation in Northamptonshire and he probably sat for the county in 1453-54. In 1457 he followed the family tradition as Speaker. The *Dictionary of National Biography* suggests that he was rewarded for his loyalty with the position of Controller of the Royal Household, but Wedgwood can find no actual trace of this appointment.<sup>36</sup> He was, however, appointed as a Justice of the Peace for Huntingdonshire from 1450 to 1459, for Northamptonshire from 1452 until 1460 and as Sheriff of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire in 1451. These appointments indicate that he was regarded as a safe Lancastrian supporter in those troubled times, as did his appointment to a Commission of *Oyer* and *Terminer* in the North Riding of Yorkshire, where the feud between the Neville and Percy families threatened the peace of the whole country.

Thomas was very conscious of the dangerous political situation in England and the threat to the incapacitated King. Together with William Joseph, the King's secretary, Thomas Daniel, Squire of the Body and John Trevelyan,

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>36</sup> Wedgwood, p. 871, note 6.



Usher of the King's Chamber, he promoted a Bill to the House of Lords in 1454 for the establishment of a garrison at Windsor for the defence of Henry VI, but with the Duke of York in charge of the Council nothing came of it. He was one of those selected in 1455 to explain the measures being taken for the defence of Calais and was allowed to collect a loan for his expenses. In the same year he was one of those summoned to represent Northamptonshire at the Great Council, but this event never took place because the first Battle of St. Albans intervened, with the Yorkist party being victorious.<sup>37</sup> Thomas almost certainly fought on the Lancastrian side at the battle,<sup>38</sup> but in spite of this he was appointed by the Protectorate of the Duke of York as Sheriff of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire in 1457 and of Surrey and Sussex in 1458. Perhaps his father's assumed Yorkist sympathies were in his favour. When the tables were turned on the Yorkists, however, at Ludlow in 1459, he was again summoned to Parliament for Northamptonshire and elected Speaker. The main business of this Parliament was the attainder of the Duke of York and his principal followers. For his services in this affair Thomas was granted £40 a year for life from lands forfeited by the Duke of York. The day after the dissolution of this Parliament he was appointed to a Commission of Array in Northamptonshire, designed to discourage any risings on behalf of the attainted Yorkist magnates.<sup>39</sup>

This time Thomas remained firmly loyal to Margaret of Anjou. He probably fought in the Battle of Northampton in 1460 and certainly took part in the second Battle of St. Albans in February 1461. After the Lancastrian victory he was knighted in the name of the young Prince of Wales and on the 6th of March the proclamation of Edward IV set £100 on his head. Three weeks later he fought at Towton and was taken prisoner. In May a commission was issued to seize his lands and in the July Parliament he was attainted of high treason. The bulk of his

<sup>37</sup> DNB.

<sup>38</sup> *The Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century* (ed.), N. Davies (Oxford, 1971-76), ii, p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> Roskell, 'Sir Thomas Tresham', *Northants. P & P*, II no. 6, p.317.

estate was granted to Jon Don, one of the Ushers of Edward IV's Chamber, with smaller parcels to Lord Ferrers, William Neville, the Earl of Kent, Ralph Hastings and even the Duke of Clarence.<sup>40</sup> His life was spared, however, and on the 26th March 1464 he was granted a general pardon, and in January 1466 he was even put on a Commission for the Peace in Northamptonshire. In 1467 he pleaded for restoration of his estate, pointing out that since Towton he had never taken the field against the King nor left the kingdom. He did have some friends at Court and his mother had married Sir William Peche of Lullingstone who had been an active Yorkist supporter. In April 1467 he was again elected as a Knight of the Shire for Northamptonshire and the Parliament of that year reversed his attainder and partially restored his lands, on the grounds that as a household servant of Henry VI he had had no choice but take the King's side in the conflict. The financial problems of those years without his estate can be seen in 1466 when he mortgaged his manor of Boughton, near Aylsbury, for £400.

In spite of Thomas's apparent rehabilitation in Court circles, the limited trust placed in him was shown in November 1468 when, along with other known Lancastrian sympathisers, he was arrested as a precautionary measure when there were signs that Margaret of Anjou was threatening an invasion. He was only released in October 1470 when the Earl of Warwick had reinstated Henry VI. On Edward IV's return in 1471 he was once again proclaimed a traitor, being one of those named individually in the writs issued by Edward IV, and with apparently nothing to lose he joined Margaret of Anjou. He fought at Tewksbury and after the battle was one of the group which sought refuge in Tewksbury Abbey. This time there was to be no second chance; he was beheaded on 6th May 1471 and

<sup>40</sup> The Act of Attainder gives a fairly complete list of his estate at this time. Around Northampton he held the manors of Sywell, Hannington, Brampton and Great Houghton together with some land at Earls Barton. In the east of the county he held Stanwick and Ringstead, plus land at Knuston and Aldwincle, and to the north he had Rushton and Haselbeck and land at Rothwell and Hanging Houghton. In Buckinghamshire he held the manors of Broughton Parva and Wavendon, and property at Stanton Barry. He also held land in Leicestershire, Rutland, Bedfordshire and Middlesex.

attainted posthumously by the Parliament of 1472.<sup>41</sup>

Sir Thomas had been married to Margaret, daughter of William, Lord Zouche of Harringworth, and by her had a son, John, and a daughter, Isabel.<sup>42</sup> This marriage had probably brought further enlargement of the family estate as the manors listed under the attainder of Thomas are not quite the same as those in the settlement of his father in 1450. The Tresham estate and the marriage of the heir formed part of the £5,000 a year granted to the Treasurer of the Royal Household in 1474, and in 1475 the estate was granted to the Queen, the Bishop of Salisbury and Master William Dudley. The Tresham heir was married to Elizabeth, daughter and coheir of Sir James Harrington of Hornby Castle, Lancashire, who was a committed Yorkist supporter<sup>43</sup> and whose cousin, Sir William Harrington, had some land at Wolfege in Brixworth. Sir James was presumably willing to take a gamble on the eventual restoration of at least part of the Tresham estate, but meanwhile Elizabeth brought land of her own to the union. In the event it was John Tresham who gained most as the 1485 Parliament of Henry VII that finally restored him to his father's estate went on to attain his Yorkist father-in-law. John did not follow his father and grandfather in a parliamentary career. His activities were limited to the local Northamptonshire scene where he served on numerous commissions between 1496 and his death around 1521 and he was also appointed as Sheriff for the county in 1506.<sup>44</sup> His main claim to a place in the Tresham story is his extension and rebuilding of Rushton Hall, presumably from the profits of the estate. The income from this has been estimated at about 500 marks a year in 1489.

John and Elizabeth had a son and heir, Thomas Tresham II, and two daughters. Thomas inherited the estate in 1521 and, unlike his father, he was

<sup>41</sup> Roskill, 'Sir Thomas Tresham', *Northants. P & P*, II no. 6, p. 321.

<sup>42</sup> For Family Tree see Appendix 2g, p. 279.

<sup>43</sup> Sir James Harrington was reputedly the man who had captured Henry VI in 1465 and certainly gave vital support to Edward IV in his struggle to regain the crown in 1471.

<sup>44</sup> Finch, pp. 67-68.

already involved in royal service. As early as 1516 he had been one of the royal household as an Esquire of the Body Extraordinary. This seemed to involve no permanent duties, just the commitment to perform tasks as necessary. He was also involved in the local scene and served as Sheriff from 1524 to January 1526 and again in 1539. He was evidently knighted before 1530 with the occasion unrecorded, but in that year he was called upon to take part in the commission that enquired into the possessions of Cardinal Wolsey and described at the time as a knight. He was made a Justice of the Peace for Northamptonshire in 1531 and regularly served on commissions in the county. Thomas married Anne, the daughter and coheir of Sir William Parr of Horton (later Lord Parr) and it was possibly his father-in-law's influence that helped to get him elected to Parliament in 1539, where he joined Sir William as a Knight of the Shire. In 1542 Sir Thomas replaced Parr as the senior representative.

Sir Thomas Tresham II set himself the task of trying to consolidate and increase the value of the family estate by selling off outlying property. That this was a deliberate policy is revealed by his will where he proudly declares that he had bought land "of moche more yearly value than those sold".<sup>45</sup> He concentrated on the areas around Rushton itself and around Lyveden in the east of the county. His holding of land as a tenant in tail meant that he was free to sell, and of the estate that he had inherited he kept only the manors of Westhall in Rushton, Rothwell, Lyveden, Churchfield, Haselbech and Hannington and land in Brampton, Northampton, Aldwinckle, Oundle and Warmington. Around Lyveden he bought assarted land and eight closes containing about 170 acres of pasture in 1538, and two years later he turned this all into a park consisting of 120 acres of wood, 250 acres of pasture and 50 acres of meadow. In the same area he bought a pasture sufficient for 300 sheep in 1544, and another small close in 1555. He was able to buy up land around Rushton because of the Dissolution in

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<sup>45</sup>PRO, PCC 19 Chanay.

which he acted as one of the King's Commissioners for the surrender of monastic lands. Much of the land around Rushton had belonged to nearby Pipewell Abbey. He was also aided in 1551 by a large grant of further monastic and chantry property; possibly as a reward for his services against the Norfolk rebels in 1449 for which he had received a cash payment of £272. 19s. 6d.<sup>46</sup>

Tresham's attitude to the Reformation and the actions against it were at variance with his own beliefs as he remained a staunch Catholic, but this was not unusual behaviour, many Catholics took a pragmatic view of the situation. After the death of Edward VI, however, he was one of the first to join Queen Mary. He refused to muster for the Duke of Northumberland, proclaimed Mary as Queen at Northampton on the 18th July, 1553, and guarded her on her march to London. He sat in her first Parliament, not for Northamptonshire, as one might have expected, but for Lancaster where he could claim distant kinship with Edward Stanley, third Earl of Derby, who was a landowner in the area. He did sit for Northamptonshire in the two Parliaments of 1554, but not in 1555 when he was serving a third term as Sheriff for the county. In 1557 he was chosen by Queen Mary as Grand Prior of the newly restored Order of St John of Jerusalem, an appointment which gave him a seat in the House of Lords. Other favours included his acquisition of considerable valuable leasehold property from the Crown which enhanced his lands in the Rushton area. When Elizabeth came to the throne she again dissolved the monastic orders but Thomas was allowed to keep the title of Lord Prior because she considered that he had rendered her a service in proclaiming Mary as Queen rather than Lady Jane Grey.

Sir Thomas Tresham II and his wife, Anne Parr, had three sons and a daughter. Anne predeceased him and he made a second marriage to Lettice, the widow of Sir Robert Lee, but there were no children from this marriage. All of his children also predeceased him but not before grandchildren were produced.

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<sup>46</sup> Finch, pp. 68-69.

John Tresham II, the eldest son and heir had married Eleanor, the daughter of Anthony Catesby of Whiston, and produced two sons and two daughters. John's sister made it a double match with the Catesby family when she married Thomas, the son and heir of Anthony. George, the second son, died by 1557, possibly unmarried, and William, the youngest, married Elizabeth Lee, the daughter of his father's second wife. Sir Thomas II died on 8 March 1559 and was buried at Rushton a week later where a white marble tomb with recumbent effigy was erected in his memory.<sup>47</sup>

The inheritance of Thomas Tresham III, eldest son of John, looked very promising. Certainly his grandfather thought so as he said in his will that he left it "...out of ioynture or dower and free from wardshipp, and not a fote of yt subject to any statut for enclosure, and verie lytle or none in lease".<sup>48</sup> By his own efforts and with the benefit of the Reformation and royal favour, Sir Thomas II had, indeed, done a good job of consolidating and adding to the estate that he had inherited. What he had not done, however, was to improve on the method of estate management which meant that the income from the estate had not reached its potential. He never reaped the benefit of sheep farming on his own account which had been enriching other Northamptonshire landowners because he let out most of his land on long and unprofitable leases.

On the other hand, there were very few charges on the estate. The children of Sir Thomas II had all died in his lifetime, as had his second wife which meant that there was no dower to be maintained. The other grandchildren had all been endowed during the lifetime of Sir Thomas II, and soon after being appointed Grand Prior he had conveyed the remainder of the estate to feoffees with the power to buy and sell and deliver them to his heir in fee simple. Thomas Tresham III was fifteen in 1559 when he succeeded to his grandfather's estate, seemingly set for a rosy future.

<sup>47</sup> The splendid funeral is described in an account of the College of Arms - MS i. 9. f. 158, *DNB*.

<sup>48</sup> PRO, PCC 19, Chaynay.

The Treshams are another good example of both the rewards to be had for loyal service to the Crown but also of the dangers involved at times of political strife. During the first half of the fifteenth century William Tresham prospered under royal favour and was able to steadily extend the family estate. Recognition of his growing status can be seen in the marriage of his eldest son to the daughter of Lord Zouche, a long standing member of the Northamptonshire nobility. Problems came with the conflict between the Houses of York and Lancaster. At first it seemed they might survive without too much setback; the support that Sir William Tresham had given to the Duke of York might have been the reason that his son retained at least a degree of royal favour with Edward IV in spite of his active involvement on the Lancastrian side. His attainder after Towton was reversed and he was partially restored to his estates. Another important consideration was probably his local influence. The family had clearly been leaders of the community over a very long period. The Lancastrian revival of 1470 put an end to this apparent reconciliation, however, and the execution of Sir Thomas I after Tewksbury highlighted the dangers of backing the wrong side.

Although this brought the Treshams to a very low ebb there was an heir, and even without the Lancastrian restoration at Bosworth, it is possible that they would have recovered. Sir Thomas Harrington presumably hoped so when he married his daughter to John Tresham. In the event, Henry VII triumphed and the Tresham's Lancastrian loyalty was rewarded with John's reinstatement. History repeated itself, with John's son and heir, Thomas II, following his grandfather's footsteps by service in the royal household.

Perhaps this reliance on royal service and favour was a weakness in Tresham success. Although Sir Thomas II managed to consolidate and extend his estate, he missed out on opportunities taken by many of his fellow landowners, to increase his wealth through improved estate management and sheep farming. On the other hand, family wealth, status and lineage were such

that they continued to attract good marriage partners, even during the period when they were out of favour at Court.

The Reformation brought new potential problems to the family who remained staunchly Roman Catholic in faith, but Sir Thomas II balanced this by being willing to support the Crown in actions involving both rebels and the church itself. In fact he gained in two ways. He benefited considerably from the Dissolution while soon afterwards his known religious conviction brought him favour when Mary came to the throne. It was not until later generations that adherence to Catholicism led the family towards the disaster of the Gunpowder plot..

### **The Vaux Family**

The Vaux family began the fifteenth century in a modest way, but within little over a century they had amassed a substantial estate and been raised to the peerage. In the second half of the fourteenth century, William Vaux I was a lawyer of Northampton town who married Eleanor Drakelow, daughter and heir of Sir Thomas of Wilby, Northamptonshire.<sup>49</sup> They had a son and two daughters. One daughter, Isobel, married William Tresham and the other, Margery, married William Harrowden; a match that brought the family their first link with Great Harrowden which was to become their home.<sup>50</sup>

William Vaux II, the son and heir, made a good marriage to Maud, sister and coheir of Sir William Lucy of Richards Castle, Herefordshire, and was soon established as one of the gentry families of the county. His standing both locally and on the wider scene can be seen by the many positions he held. He was appointed as Sheriff for Northamptonshire in 1436, 1449 and 1453, was made a Justice of the Peace in 1445, a position that he held until 1458, and between 1453 and 1460 he was on many commissions in the county. He was also a

<sup>49</sup> Bindoff, p. 904.

<sup>50</sup> For Family Tree see Appendix 2h, p. 280.



Justice of the Peace for Lindsey from 1453 until 1458, and in 1444 he had an annuity of 10 marks from the subsidy of wool in the port of London.

In 1456 his son, William III, married Katherine, said to be a daughter of Gregory Peniston of Counsells, Provence. Katherine was one of the ladies-in-waiting to the Queen, Margaret of Anjou. This put the family firmly in the Lancastrian camp and in the troubled times towards the end of the 1450s, William II was trusted with the Sheriff's office for Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. He was made Escheator for Northamptonshire and Rutland in 1457 and was on the Commissions for Array in Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire in 1459. By August of the following year he was probably dead as at that time his son and heir, William III, was granted seisin as a coheir of the estate of Sir William Lucy, his uncle. Sir William Lucy had been slain at the Battle of Northampton and it is likely that William Vaux II also lost his life on the same occasion.<sup>51</sup>

William Vaux III had at some stage been knighted as at the first Parliament of Edward IV in 1461 he was referred to as Sir William. He was attainted by this Parliament and his estates confiscated, and it is very likely that he fled abroad in the company of Margaret of Anjou. He returned with her in 1471 and was one of those killed in the Lancastrian defeat at Tewksbury. His estates were given to Ralph Hastings, brother of Lord William Hastings. Sir William Vaux's wife remained faithful to Queen Margaret, staying with her during her imprisonment in the Tower of London, accompanying her into exile and presumably staying with her to the end as she was a witness to Margaret's will.

During the whole period of Yorkist rule, the only Vaux presence in the country were the two children that Katherine Vaux left behind. Nicholas (and probably also his sister Jane) was brought up in the household of Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond, without charge, though Edward IV did restore

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<sup>51</sup> Wedgewood, p. 904.

two of the Vaux manors for their maintenance.<sup>52</sup> Under the influence of Margaret, it is not surprising that Nicholas maintained the family loyalty to the Lancastrian cause, and he probably fought under her husband, Lord Stanley, at Bosworth. At Henry VII's first Parliament, in November 1485, Nicholas Vaux petitioned for the repeal of the attainder and forfeiture of his father and he was soon restored to his lands. His sister also did well after Bosworth as she not only entered the royal household as a governess to Henry VII's daughters, but also made two good marriages; the first to Sir Edward Guildford and the second to Sir Anthony Poyntz of Acton.

Nicholas seems to have successfully divided his time between local affairs in Northamptonshire and involvement in national events. He apparently lived at Harrowden as a tenant of his great aunt Margery who died in 1486. She left a daughter and heir, Margaret, but at some point Nicholas seems to have taken over and it was probably around this time that he built the manor house there.<sup>53</sup> Soon after the reversal of his father's attainder, in 1485, Nicholas was made a Justice of the Peace for Northamptonshire, a position that he held until his death. In the same year he was granted the stewardship for life of Olney and Newport Pagnell in Buckinghamshire. He fought again for the King at Stoke and Blackheath and it was at Stoke in 1487 that he was knighted on the field for his services. Ten years later he was created a banneret. From the late fifteenth century Nicholas emerged as one of the leading members of county commissions, appearing in 1488/9 with Richard, Earl Ryvers, George, Lord Grey, John Grey of Wilton, Sir Thomas Grene and Sir Guy Wolston on a commission headed by Edward, Earl of Wiltshire, to enquire into the number of archers in the county.<sup>54</sup> After the death of the Earl of Wiltshire, Nicholas was often the leader of commissions. He was made Sheriff of Northamptonshire three times - in 1495,

<sup>52</sup> Bindoff, p. 521.

<sup>53</sup> G. Anstruther, *Vaux of Harrowden*, (Newport, 1953), pp. 8-9.

<sup>54</sup> Campbell, *Materials*, p. 385.

1501 and 1516, and appointed Constable of Rockingham Castle in 1502. Also in 1502 he was appointed as Lieutenant of Guisnes for life. When he was in England he was frequently at court where "... his taste for magnificence of dress made him conspicuous".<sup>55</sup> He was usually listed as present on important occasions such as the creation of Henry as Duke of York in 1494, the reception of Catherine of Aragon in 1501, and the meeting of Henry VII with Archduke Philip in 1500.<sup>56</sup>

Royal favour continued under Henry VIII with the confirmation of Nicholas as lieutenant of Guisnes, and in 1511 he was one of a group of six men who were commissioned to set up an inquisition into the possessions of Sir Richard Empson. Vaux had probably been one of those to suffer financial penalties under Empson and Dudley but he was rewarded with some of Empson's offices.<sup>57</sup> For example he was made steward of Potterspury and other land in Northamptonshire which had lately belonged to the Countess of Richmond, and also made steward of More End and Yardley Gobion. In July of 1511 he actually entertained Henry VIII at Harrowden; a good indication of favour and status.<sup>58</sup> He was clearly a successful soldier and diplomat. He was involved in various negotiations with Burgundy and in 1513 discussed the English withdrawal after the Tournai campaign with the French King. In this campaign he had distinguished himself by serving as a Commander of the English Vanguard under Charles Brandon. In 1514 he was one of those selected to meet Henry VIII's sister, Princess Mary, and accompany her to Abbeville for her marriage to Louis XII, and in 1515 he was bearer of the canopy at the christening of Henry VIII's daughter, Mary. In 1520 he was involved in the preparations for the Field of the Cloth of Gold which was held between his base at Guisnes and Ardres.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *DNB*.

<sup>56</sup> Gairdner, *Letters and Papers*, vol. i, pp. 403, 410; vol. ii, p. 88.

<sup>57</sup> *LP* 1, nos. 464, 545, 777, 1026, 1511, 1518.

<sup>58</sup> *LP* 2, n. 1452.

<sup>59</sup> *DNB*.

Nicholas was not always abroad, but managed to spend the summer at his post in Guisnes and the autumn and winter months in England.<sup>60</sup> He made two profitable marriages. The first, in 1483/4, was to Elizabeth, the daughter and coheir of Henry, fifth Lord Fitzhugh, and the widow of Sir William Parr of Kendal, another royal servant. His second marriage, in 1507/8, perhaps brought him an even wealthier bride in Anne Grene, the eldest daughter and coheiress of Sir Thomas Grene of Greens Norton who had often been his compatriot on commissions and royal occasions. He made sure that the inheritance stayed in the family by marrying Anne's sister, Maude, to his stepson, Thomas Parr. The girls inherited land in Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Kent, Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire. They were minors at the time of their marriages and attempts were made by prominent figures to obtain possession of the estate for the Crown.<sup>61</sup> Sir Nicholas Vaux and Thomas Parr had to enter into an agreement to pay the King 9,000 marks (£6,000). It is not clear whether this was a fine for having married without permission or for licence to marry wards of court. Less than a third was actually paid with the rest being remitted in 1509, after the accession of Henry VIII.<sup>62</sup>

Evidence of the interest of Nicholas Vaux in his English estates also comes from his involvement in the spreading practice of enclosure. He was mentioned in the 1517/18 report on enclosure as having violated the Act against Enclosure three times. In 1490 at Stanton Bray in Buckinghamshire, in 1493 at his main residence at Harrowden, and in 1509 at Carcewell in Northamptonshire. For these offences, and for the offences committed by his father-in-law, Sir Thomas Grene, he was summoned before the Court of the Exchequer in 1519 and in 1527. He escaped penalty by obtaining a supersedeas and after his death a pardon was granted for all offences.<sup>63</sup> He

<sup>60</sup> *LP* 1, app. iv, 87.

<sup>61</sup> Baker ii, p.60; *LP* 1, n. 602.

<sup>62</sup> *LP* 1, n. 600.

<sup>63</sup> *DNB*; *LP* 4, n. 4231.

probably sat more than once as a Knight of the Shire for Northamptonshire but many of the Tudor returns are missing. He was certainly a member of the House of Commons in 1515, presumably representing his home county.

The career of Sir Nicholas was not entirely without its problems. In the first few years of the sixteenth century there was a reputed attempt by the Yorkist party to interfere with his Lancastrian loyalty, with no apparent success. He was suspected of involvement in the conspiracy Edmund de la Pole but managed to prove his innocence.<sup>64</sup> His Northamptonshire colleague and eventual father-in-law, Sir Thomas Grene, was not so lucky. He was actually imprisoned in the Tower with Lord Abergavenny. Both men managed to prove their innocence but Sir Thomas fell ill and died there.<sup>65</sup> Nicholas Vaux did maintain links with Yorkist leaders and in May 1521 he was again suspected of involvement in intended treason, this time that of Edward Stafford, third Duke of Buckingham.<sup>66</sup> There seems to have been no direct evidence against him, but to assure themselves of his loyalty the government appointed him to the Commission of *Oyer* and *Terminer* which indicted the Duke in May 1521.<sup>67</sup>

These slight setbacks did not halt the progress of Sir Nicholas and in 1523 he was summoned to the House of Lords as Lord Vaux of Harrowden. This honour was a reward for long service, but probably in particular for the part he had played in the defence of Guisnes in June 1522, and to Henry VIII's conviction that wartime leadership abroad was best provided by noblemen.<sup>68</sup> He seems to have been wounded in this engagement and never fully recovered. He died in the hospital of St John, Clerkenwell, on 14th May, 1523, in the middle of his first parliamentary session as a baron. He had made a will just three days before his death which provided for his servants and left £500 each to each of his

<sup>64</sup> DNB; Gairdner, *Letters and Papers*, vol. i, p. 231.

<sup>65</sup> Anstruther, *Vaux*, p. 16.

<sup>66</sup> DNB.

<sup>67</sup> LP 3, n. 1284.

<sup>68</sup> Miller, *Henry VIII*, p. 35.

three unmarried daughters by his second marriage; a substantial dowry at that time. His younger son, William, was left £1,000 to be invested or to buy him a wife. Nicholas also founded a chantry in the parish church of his manor at Harrowden and left a further £100 for religious uses.<sup>69</sup> His choice of executors shows links with his family and home, as George Throckmorton, his son-in-law, and Richard Knightley, a Northamptonshire lawyer, were included, as was his brother-in-law, Sir Edward Guildford. His stepson, Sir William Parr, was one of the supervisors named in his will, and Lord Henry Marney, Lord Privy Seal, the other, but Henry died just ten days after Vaux himself.<sup>70</sup>

Sir Nicholas had three daughters by his first wife and a further three, plus two sons, from his second marriage. All of these children married into substantial families from Northamptonshire and surrounding counties, but given the apparent status and presumable wealth of their father, one might have expected something better for at least some of them. Not all of the families concerned even held knighthoods. Maude, the youngest, married Sir John Fermor, son of Richard Fermor who was a fairly recent but wealthy resident in Northamptonshire. A good match for John as it brought him kinship with one of the leading county families, and a financially sound one for her. Nicholas Vaux was succeeded by his eldest son Thomas.

Thomas Vaux was only fourteen at the death of his father in 1523, but he seems to have had no wardship problems. At first royal favour continued as in 1527 he attended Cardinal Wolsey on his embassy to France. In 1532 he accompanied the King to Calais and Boulogne as only one of nine barons in attendance alongside most of the country's high noblemen,<sup>71</sup> and he was knighted at the coronation of Anne Boleyn in May 1533. For a few months in 1536 he was Governor of the island of Jersey, in succession to Sir Arthur Darcy.

<sup>69</sup> PRO, PCC 11 Bodfelde.

<sup>70</sup> Bindoff, pp. 521-22.

<sup>71</sup> Miller, *Henry VIII*, pp. 96-97.

The request made by Darcy for Vaux's appointment, was part of an agreement between them when Thomas sold Darcy the manor of Greens Norton and other manors. The King was also part of the agreement as Darcy was bound to sell the said manors to Henry himself. The King's possession was confirmed by an Act of Parliament and a second Act bound Thomas not to sell any more land without the King's direct permission. Thomas seems to have seen everything in terms of what he could sell. His appointment as governor of Jersey had a proviso that his appointment would be forfeit if he tried to sell the office without special licence but in July 1536 he did just that, when Edward Seymour, Viscount Beauchamp, paid him £150 for the position.<sup>72</sup>

Thomas inherited his father's title and in 1531 he took his place in the House of Lords as Baron Vaux of Harrowden. After the dissolution of the Reformation Parliament in 1536, however, he never again attended the House, in spite of regular summons, until the reign of Mary. Anstruther and Miller have taken this as part of the evidence for a strong commitment to Roman Catholicism, together with the fact that he was never called upon to sit on trials of fellow peers, even though he lived a convenient travelling distance from London.<sup>73</sup> Also in 1539/40 his absence, as one of only eleven barons who did not accompany Henry VIII to meet Anne of Cleves, contrasted sharply with his presence at earlier similar state occasions.<sup>74</sup> In the latter part of Henry's reign Thomas took no part in political life - not even as a Justice of the Peace for the county.

It would appear that Thomas had not inherited his father's interest in his Northamptonshire estates, nor his ability to manage them, if his sale of manors is seen to be indicative. His own claim to fame is as a poet and some of his work still survives.<sup>75</sup> He had married a bride of similar social status, Elizabeth Cheyne, the daughter of Sir Thomas Cheyne of Irthlingborough, and together they

<sup>72</sup> Miller, *Henry VIII*, p. 185.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.44; Anstruther, *Vaux*, p. 43.

<sup>74</sup> Miller, *Henry VIII*, p.99.

<sup>75</sup> Anstruther, *Vaux*. The poems form Appendix B.

produced two sons and two daughters. Before the problems of the Reformation, their membership of the cultured Court circle around Henry VIII is probably best seen in the portraits by Holbein of Thomas and his wife. Two drawings are at Windsor, another drawing of Lady Vaux is in the Imperial Palace at Prague and a finished portrait of her is at Hampton Court.<sup>76</sup>

After the Reformation the members of the Vaux family retained their Catholic faith, and Thomas Vaux's son and heir, William IV, is best known for his devotion to this cause. Both of William's wives, Elizabeth, the daughter of John Beaumont of Grace Dieu, Leicestershire and Mary, daughter of John Tresham of Rushton, shared his faith as did all of their descendants until the direct line died out in 1661.<sup>77</sup>

The Vaux family began their rise towards money and status as lawyers, but from the middle of the fifteenth century changed track and made their way through royal service in both military and diplomatic capacities. This change may have been forced upon them by the events of the Wars of the Roses where their unwavering Lancastrian allegiance brought problems of death and exile. The victory of Henry VII at last brought rewards for faithfulness; a clear indication that Bosworth heralded a Lancastrian revival. After the Reformation, however, this characteristic of keeping faith with their beliefs was not to the Vauxes advantage. There is some evidence that Sir Thomas was sidelined because of his Roman Catholicism and for a family that owed its whole success to royal service and favour this was a major setback. Probably as much to blame for lack of progress in the middle of the sixteenth century, however, was the actual character of Thomas. He lacked the drive and commitment necessary to bring about continuing financial success, preferring to interest himself in the cultural scene. Through advantageous marriages and royal service Sir Nicholas Vaux brought

<sup>76</sup> DNB.

<sup>77</sup> Even today many of the tenant farmers on the old Vaux estate around Harrington are Roman Catholics. A long standing testament, maybe, to the family's faith.



the family to wealth and prestige but his descendants were not able to capitalise on this position.

### **The Parr Family**

The Parrs were another family with a well established pedigree. They originally came from Parr in Lancashire, but in the late fourteenth century Sir William Parr I married Elizabeth, the daughter of John de Ros, Baron of Kendal. Through her, William inherited Kendal Castle and a fourth part of the barony of Kendal. His grandson, Sir Thomas Parr I, was a very active member of the local community. He was Sheriff of Westmorland, from 1461 to 1475, and a Member of Parliament for the county.<sup>78</sup> The gentry families of Westmorland and Cumberland were a close knit group, surrounded as they were by natural boundaries. At first the Parrs followed local tradition and kept their activities and marriages within the region, but they soon became one of the few families to extend their horizons beyond the North West.

From the early days of its emergence, Sir Thomas was a supporter of the 'Yorkist Party' and took an active part in the Wars of the Roses. In May 1460 he was listed with Richard, late Duke of York, and others as traitors, and the occupiers of their land were ordered to pay their arrears of rent to Sir Thomas Grey.<sup>79</sup> He died in 1464 leaving three sons and six daughters. The girls all married members of prominent local families, but the boys looked further afield. Like their father they were all active in the civil wars on the Yorkist side and Thomas II, the youngest, who had served for some time as squire to Richard, Duke of Gloucester, was killed at Barnet in 1471. The second son, John, married a daughter of Sir John Yonge, Lord Mayor of London, and divided his interest between the royal court and the North West. He was rewarded for his efforts on

<sup>78</sup> J. Nicholson & R. Burn, *The History & Antiquities of Westmorland and Cumberland* (London, 1777, reprinted 1976), Vol. i, pp. 42-43.

<sup>79</sup> *CCR 1454-1461*, n. 409.

the Yorkist side by being made Sheriff of Westmorland for life in 1462, but it was Cumberland that he represented in Parliament. In 1461 he was made a Squire of the Body and by 1472 was a Knight of the same. Both William and John were granted lands taken from Lancastrian supporters.

The eldest son, William Parr II, was made a Knight of the Garter by Edward IV, and although he took the side of the Nevilles in 1469 and was their messenger in 1470, just before the Battle of Lose-Coat-Field, he did not lose Edward's trust. He justified this in 1471 when Edward returned from exile by meeting him at Nottingham and giving an oath of allegiance.<sup>80</sup> He was rewarded with the position of Comptroller of the Household, a position he held until his death. His authority in the North West was the reverse of his brother as he was Sheriff for Cumberland, from 1473 to 1483, and sat as a Knight of the Shire for Westmorland in 1467 and 1473.

Sir William Parr's first marriage was to Joan Trusbet, widow of Thomas Colt of Royden, Essex, but she died in 1473 and he then married Elizabeth, daughter of Henry, fifth Lord Fitzhugh. By her he had a daughter and three sons.<sup>81</sup> It was Elizabeth who brought the Parr family its Northamptonshire connections. After William's death, around 1483, she married Sir Nicholas Vaux of Harrowden and her daughter Anne married Sir Thomas Cheyne of Irthlingborough. With the fall of the House of York, this marriage to the Lancastrian Vauxes came at an opportune time for the Parr family.

After the death of Elizabeth, Sir Nicholas Vaux married the wealthy heiress Anne Grene, and the bond was consolidated by the marriage of Elizabeth's eldest son, Thomas Parr III, to Anne's sister and coheiress Maude.<sup>82</sup> The royal favour which Vaux enjoyed was shared by his stepsons. Thomas was a Squire of the Body to Henry VII and knighted at his coronation.<sup>83</sup> He was pricked

<sup>80</sup> *CCR 1468-1476*, n. 858.

<sup>81</sup> For Family Tree see Appendix 2i, p. 281.

<sup>82</sup> For details of this double marriage, see above, p. 144.

<sup>83</sup> *LP 1*, 20 f. 125 and 81.

as Sheriff for Northamptonshire in the first year of the reign of Henry VIII, and was also Comptroller of the Royal Household, the same position that his father had held under Edward IV. In 1510 he was granted manors in Buckinghamshire that had belonged to Sir Richard Empson,<sup>84</sup> and his wealth increased in 1512 when he succeeded to half of the estate of his cousin Lord Fitzhugh. He was in the King's retinue in 1513 at Calais, where both he and his step-father, Sir Nicholas Vaux, were in the vanguard and commissioned to each providing 100 men.<sup>85</sup> He apparently made Blackfriars his main home and both he and his wife were buried there. He died in 1518 when Maude was only twenty two, but unlike most other young widows, she did not remarry but devoted herself to the education of her children - two daughters, Anne and Catherine, and a son, William Parr IV.

The regard in which Thomas Parr III was held is indicated by the gold chain which he willed to his son. It was valued at £140 and had been a gift from the King. He also left £800 to be shared between his two daughters as marriage portions and 100 marks to a charity of Kendal. He clearly had a modest side to his character as he asked to be buried without pomp or pride.<sup>86</sup> All of the family did well long before Catherine's famous marriage to Henry VIII. Anne married William Herbert, first Earl of Pembroke, and in 1541 William married Anne, daughter and heir of Henry Bouchier, second Earl of Essex. Lord Dacre made a bid himself for the marriage of Catherine but his offer was apparently not acceptable. Under the terms of her father's will, she eventually married Edward Bougham who was already elderly, and after his death she married John Neville, Lord Latimer, who took part in the Pilgrimage of Grace. He died in 1542/3 and she was sought in marriage by Sir Thomas Seymour, but he had to give way to Henry VIII.<sup>87</sup>

The second son of Sir William Parr of Kendal, also called William, was

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, g 632, n. 72.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 2053 (1).

<sup>86</sup> Nicholson & Burn, *History & Antiquities*, p. 43; PRO, PCC 32 Alenger.

<sup>87</sup> *DNB*.

brought up in close proximity to the royal Household. He appeared at Court in 1506 as one of the King's spears and he was both a Squire of the Body to Henry VII, and a Knight of the Body to Henry VIII. He was popular at Court because of his skill in tournaments and was often chosen as opponent for the King himself. In 1513 he went in Sir William Sandys's retinue to the French campaigns and was knighted at Tournai. In 1511 he furthered the family's Northamptonshire connections when he married Mary, the daughter and coheir of Sir William Salisbury of Horton. He followed his step-father, Sir Nicholas Vaux, as Sheriff for the county in 1517 and a year later arranged a marriage between his eldest daughter and the son and heir of William Lane, a Northamptonshire gentleman. Other local marriages followed for his remaining daughters, including one into the Tresham family when Anne married Sir Thomas Tresham, who was later to be the Prior of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.

Sir William Parr of Horton probably spent much of his time in London where, like his brother, he apparently had a house in Blackfriars. His military service continued and in 1520 he accompanied the King to the Field of the Cloth of Gold and to Gravelines. He served under the Earl of Surrey in the Northern Wars and distinguished himself by his valour. His service was rewarded by the chamberlainship of the household of the Duke of Richmond, Henry VIII's bastard son. His task was to educate the young Prince and to govern the north of England. How conscientious he was in fulfilling these tasks is dubious as Richmond's schoolmaster, Richard Croke, complained that in two years William had been absent for sixty six weeks, but the King maintained him in favour and removed Croke and not Parr. Favour was passed on by Sir William to Nicholas Throckmorton, one of the sons of his half sister, Catherine Vaux, who became a page in the household of the Duke of Richmond.

William Parr III managed to combine a visible presence in London to attend Parliament with his responsibilities in the North, and was used as a link

between the royal councillors in these respective locations.<sup>88</sup> He also developed his connections with Northamptonshire and it was as a Knight of that Shire that he was elected to Parliament in 1529, and may even have sat on earlier occasions. He was appointed regularly to county commissions and had two further spells as Sheriff for the county in 1522 and 1533. Bindoff suggests that this last appointment was because he was one of the few men powerful enough to control the Knightley brothers in their intrigues over the wardship of their sister's son, the heir of Sir William Spencer.<sup>89</sup>

When the Duke of Richmond died, in 1536, Parr's links with the North ceased and even before this his influence there had been waning, as indicated by his failure in 1535 to obtain the captaincy of Berwick. Perhaps in an effort to renew his favour, he was one of the first to answer the King's call to arms when the Lincolnshire rebellion broke out in the autumn of that year, but in spite of good service, he was not rewarded with any of the attainted lands. He then turned his attention to the preservation of law and order in the Midlands; perhaps over zealously if some of the stories are to be believed.<sup>90</sup> This time he was shown royal favour as at the Dissolution of the monasteries he was granted the leases of several monastic lands. The marriage of his niece Catherine to the King, in 1543, ensured a continuation of this favour. He became the Chamberlain of her Household and in 1544 was summoned to Parliament as Baron Parr of Horton. In the same year the Duke of Suffolk asked for his help in the war with Scotland, but instead the King made him one of the council to advise Queen Catherine during his own absence.

Lord Parr died in 1547 and, in the absence of male heirs, the barony became extinct. Queen Catherine, his niece, and his nephew, William Parr IV, Earl of Essex, were the overseers of his will, and another nephew, Nicholas

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<sup>88</sup> Bindoff, p. 61.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

Throckmorton, was one of the executors. By then Nicholas had benefited considerably from his relationship to the Parrs. From his start in the household of the Duke of Richmond he was then taken into the household of his cousin, Sir William Parr IV, and when William's sister, Catherine, became Queen, both Nicholas, and his brother Clement, were appointed to her household.

Sir William Parr IV had succeeded to his father's estate in 1518 and followed him in a career of military service. He took part in the campaign against the northern rebels and in 1538 was one of those who tried the Lincolnshire rebels. He was knighted in 1537 and then in 1539 was created Baron Parr and Ros of Kendal, the old family seat. His Northamptonshire connections remained and he was made keeper of the parks at Brigstock in December of 1539 and keeper of the park at Moulton in 1541. When his sister became Queen he naturally benefited further. In March 1543 he became a Privy Councillor and Lord Warden of the Marches towards Holland, and a month later was placed on the Council of the North. In December of the same year he was created Earl of Essex, a title which had become extinct on the death of his wife's father in 1539,<sup>91</sup> and he was also given the barony of Hartwell. He was left £200 by Henry VIII in his will and favour continued under Edward VI's minority. He was created Marquis of Northampton in February 1547, and in July 1549 appointed Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Norfolk and Northamptonshire.

In 1547 he took the unusual step of divorcing his wife in order to marry Elizabeth Brook, the daughter of Lord Cobham. He seems to have been so impatient to make this second marriage that he did not allow time for the full proceedings of the divorce and had to involve himself in litigation over the next few years to secure the legality of this marriage. It was settled by an Act of Parliament in 1552 but this was repealed by Queen Mary, leaving the marriage

<sup>91</sup> Cromwell had briefly been given this title in 1540 but was executed three months later.

again in some doubt.

His military service continued and in the expedition to Boulogne, in 1544, he was chief captain of the men-at-arms. In 1549 he led troops to raise the siege of Norwich but was defeated easily by Kett. As a consequence his command was given to Dudley but it was only his military tactics that were in doubt, as in February 1550 he was created Great Chamberlain, a position that he held until 1553. The death of Edward VI brought problems to Sir William. He was a friend of the Duke of Northumberland and not only signed the document agreeing to the succession of Lady Jane Grey, but fought with Northumberland in the eastern counties for her cause. Perhaps because of his relationship with the widowed Queen Catherine, he escaped execution and was merely attainted and deprived of the Order of the Garter. He was suspected of complicity in Wyatt's rebellion but once again pardoned. He only recovered part of his estates, however, and his rank was not returned. Throughout Mary's reign he was known simply as Sir William Parr, but on the accession of Queen Elizabeth he became once more the Marquis of Northampton.

The basis of Parr family success was quite clearly service to the Crown, which in the first instance was in a military capacity. They were ambitious enough to recognise that to achieve advancement they needed to extend their activities beyond the confines of Westmorland and Cumberland, something that was quite unusual in that fairly closed community. They were also survivors who made the transition from strong Yorkist support to Tudor favour with no sign of any hitch along the way. They suffered no repercussions for having supported Warwick in 1469, indeed they were even rewarded by Edward IV for their return to the fold in 1471, and suffered only a temporary setback for active involvement against Mary.

There is always an element of luck in survival. Who could have anticipated the eventual beneficiary from a marriage in 1483/4 between a strong Lancastrian family, the Vauxes, and an equally committed Yorkist one? It could just as easily

have been the Vauxes who benefited from the Parrs' Yorkist links. In spite of the fact that Thomas Parr II had been squire to Richard III in the 1470s, and shared his exile in Burgundy, there is no evidence of any Parr involvement with Richard as King. This no doubt helped them to make the transition to the Tudor regime. Luck also played a part in the Parr's accumulation of wealth when Lord Fitzhugh died without an heir and half of his estate passed to Sir Thomas Parr as the son of Fitzhugh's sister/aunt?

It would appear that personality also played a part in Parr success. Quite simply people liked them and personal preference was always a significant element in royal favour. This likeable side of their nature can, perhaps, be seen in their strong family loyalty. If one member of the family was doing well then he or she made sure that favour was passed on to other members of the immediate and extended family. This became particularly significant after the marriage of Catherine to Henry VIII.

Unlike most families in the sixteenth century there is little evidence of the Parrs consolidating their position by buying land and property, or getting into the lucrative business of enclosure and sheep farming, but it could just be that evidence has not survived. In any case there is no suggestion of economic problems. Their eventual failure was due entirely to physiological causes as neither William Parr III, Baron Parr of Horton, nor William Parr IV, Marquis of Northampton, produced any male heirs.

### **The Spencer Family**

From the latter part of the fifteenth century the Spencers began to rise from their relatively modest beginnings. At this time they were graziers in Warwickshire where they owned little land of their own, but rented from a variety of people to accommodate their growing flocks of sheep. William Spencer I of Radbourne married Elizabeth, a sister of Richard Empson, and his brother [?],



John Spencer I of Hodnell, married the other sister, Anne.<sup>92</sup> Dr Finch suggests that it could have been this link with Empson that enabled the Spencers to acquire the wealth to make their investment in sheep.<sup>93</sup> It is difficult to tell which family saw the most advantage in the marriage at the time, perhaps it was a case of one ambitious man recognising another. It was William Spencer's son, John II, who actually laid the foundations of the family's wealth by his skilful choice of land to rent, much of it in areas that were already depopulated and sometimes already enclosed.

John Spencer II lived first at Snitterfield, a manor which he might have acquired through his marriage to Isabel, a daughter and co-heiress of Walter Graunt, but in 1497, on the death of his uncle John, he moved to Hodnell to manage affairs during his cousin's minority. He also rented land at Hodnell, from the Prioress of Nuneaton, the manors of Wormleighton and Fenny Compton, from William Cope, his cousin's husband, a pasture in Stoneton, from Sir Edward Raleigh and others, the rectory of Radbourn, from the Prioress of Henwood, and the manors of Ladbroke and Radbourn, from Sir John Rysley. Perhaps significantly, Hodnell, Radbourn and Ladbroke were listed by Rous as already depopulated between 1459 and 1486.<sup>94</sup>

During this period it was possible to make large sums of money from sheep farming and John Spencer certainly did so. The profits of his enterprise enabled him to begin to purchase lands in fee. In 1506 he bought the manor of Wormleighton and land in Fenny Compton from William Cope for £1,900. He built a manor house at Wormleighton which he made his home, but two years later he turned his attention to Northamptonshire where he bought the manor of Althorp for £800. In 1510 he extended his holdings in the county with purchases of the manor of Hinton in the parish of Woodford and the manors of Upper and

<sup>92</sup> For Family Tree see Appendix 2j, p. 282.

<sup>93</sup> Finch, p. 38.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 38-39.

Lower Boddington. The manors of Wicken and Nobottle followed in 1511 and then there was a gap until 1518 when he bought the manor of Stoneton (at that time in Northamptonshire) for £400.<sup>95</sup>

The advantages of not starting from the position of an ancestral estate becomes clear with these purchases. Old estates were usually scattered as they had been acquired over a long period of time, often through marriage. John Spencer, on the other hand, was not only able to ensure that his purchases grouped together to form two consolidated blocks around Wormleighton and Althorp (with the exception of Wicken), but also able to use his expertise as a grazier to choose land which was particularly suited to sheep. His opportunities for advantageous purchases were further enhanced by the country's economy which made it a buyer's market. Much of the land that he chose was already enclosed and converted to pasture which saved him time and expense. John was not only skilled in selecting good land, but he was also a successful sheep breeder who built up valuable flocks from his own stock.

By 1504 John Spencer II and his brother Thomas had reached a position to be granted a coat of arms. The move of the family into Northamptonshire began in 1508 when Sir John built a new house on his land at Althorp. Further recognition of the growing status of the family can be seen with him being pricked as Sheriff for the county, in 1511, and with the marriages of three of his children into established Northamptonshire gentry families. Two of these marriages were into the same family, the Knightleys of Fawsley, who combined wealth with ancient lineage. The latter was probably as important to the Spencers as the money.<sup>96</sup> Sir John Spencer's eldest son, William, married Susan, the daughter of Sir Richard Knightley of Fawsley, and his eldest daughter, Jane, became the third wife of Sir Richard's heir, Richard Knightley of Upton.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>96</sup> Their concern to establish a respectable lineage is demonstrated a few years later with their claim to be descended from the Despencer family.

These double marriages seem to have been quite common between families of similar wealth and status. The youngest daughter, Dorothy, was married to Sir Richard Catesby who was a ward of her father. Even though the Catesby family had had money problems for some time, they too possessed the attraction of ancient lineage. The middle daughter, Isabel, also made a good marriage to Sir Nicholas Strelley of Strelley, Nottinghamshire.

John Spencer died in 1522 at the old family home at Wormleighton, but he requested to be buried near Althorp in the church at Great Brington. He left £11 for repairs to the church and £20 for a marble tomb to himself and his wife which is still situated in the first of three arches which separate the Spencer family chapel from the chancel. This magnificent monument was only the first of many to be erected by the Spencer family. His will makes it clear that he had already largely rebuilt the church itself and established the family chapel there.<sup>97</sup> The scope of the project gives a very clear indication that the Spencers were already very wealthy indeed, and his request for the family coat of arms to be set into the windows of the church shows his concern for establishing a reputable Spencer heritage. John was succeeded by his son, William Spencer II, who was Sheriff for the county in 1531.

William produced no less than five daughters but did manage the one important son and heir, another John. William died in 1532 when John Spencer III was only eight years old, and his mother and her two brothers, Edmund and Richard Knightley, were involved in a dispute with the Crown over the wardship of the heir John Spencer. They claimed that Sir William had not held any land by knight service and that the King did not have, therefore, the feudal right to the wardship.<sup>98</sup> They eventually lost the case and the wardship of John was granted to Giles Allington. When John attained his majority in 1545 we get some indication of the total value of the estate held at that time from the Crown as he

<sup>97</sup> PRO, PCC 24 Maynwaryng.

<sup>98</sup> See above pp. 111-12 for details of this case.

sought a special livery of his father's lands. The resulting feodary's survey valued the estate at £454. 13s. 4d. a year, but even this, Dr. Finch argues, was almost certainly an underestimation. She bases this judgement on the grounds that the part of the estate held in jointure by John's grandmother Isabel was only valued at £62. 3s. 10d., whereas when it had been granted to her by her husband it had been worth £100 a year, and land rental values were rising rather than depreciating.<sup>99</sup>

By 1545 John had been married to Katherine, the daughter of Sir Thomas Kitson of Hengrave, Suffolk, a wealthy mercer and Merchant Adventurer. This was presumably an advantageous match on both sides. The Kitsons reinforced their position among the landed gentry and the Spencers got access to City money. Sir Thomas Kitson had been able to furnish loans to the Crown; marriage into the Spencer family was possibly a result of royal favour. John Spencer added to the family estate by careful purchases. Both he and his successors were in a position to wait until the right parcels of land came on the market, that is land around their existing estates in Northamptonshire and Warwickshire.

The financial success of John Spencer III can be implied from the marriage settlements that he was able to make on his children, and by the marriage partners that he was able to attract to the family. His eldest son John IV made a very advantageous marriage to Mary, the only daughter and heiress of Sir Robert Catlin, Lord Chief Justice. Like the Spencers, the Catlins had recently made their fortunes, but in their case it was via the law. Providing that John and Mary produced male heirs, the bulk of the Catlin estate was to pass to the Spencer family (which it duly did). The main part of the Spencer estate was entailed to the eldest son but John III was able to provide estates for his younger sons in his own lifetime as well as leaving them rented land, money and goods by his will.<sup>100</sup> In addition he was able to provide generous marriage settlements

<sup>99</sup> Finch, p. 39.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

for his six daughters. Dr Finch points to the fact that over several generations, and in spite of an abundance of daughters, none of the Spencers was forced into socially disadvantageous marriages, a good indicator of their success.<sup>101</sup> She calculates that the marriages of his daughters cost Sir John III a total of at least £6,000 as the surviving settlement for Margaret shows a portion of £1,000 plus a jointure of £171. 13.s 4d., and her match to Giles Allington of Horsheath, Cambridgeshire, was probably the least ambitious of the marriages. Other sons-in-law included William Stanley, Lord Monteagle, and Ferdinando Stanley, fifth Earl of Derby.

There is no evidence that John Spencer III experienced any difficulty over religious issues during the reign of Henry VIII and, indeed, he was in sufficient favour to serve his first term as Sheriff of Northamptonshire in 1551, under Edward VI. There is evidence, however, that he had retained his Roman Catholic faith as he was knighted by Mary at her coronation, with the implication that he had declared for her the previous summer.<sup>102</sup> He was elected twice as a Knight of the Shire under Mary, in 1554 and 1558, but also served three more terms as Sheriff under Elizabeth in 1558, 1571 and 1583. He was also appointed as a Justice of the Peace both by Mary, in 1554, and by Elizabeth I, from 1461 until his death in 1586. He apparently remained a Catholic as in 1564 Bishop Scambler said he was a "great letter of religion".<sup>103</sup> His continuance in shire administration could be indicative of his willingness to conform, as suggested by Bindoff, or of the Crown's recognition of his importance in local affairs.

In contrast to many other families, the whole basis of Spencer wealth came from their success as sheep farmers. It was more common for a family to rise through a combination of circumstances, usually involving patronage and royal favour. Dr Finch argues that it was their very lack of connections that

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>102</sup> Bindoff, pp. 360-61.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 361.

enabled them to make such rapid progress as

... the success of a state official might depend on his living up to the hilt of his income and making the most of opportunities of securing influence and patronage by spectacular expenditure.<sup>104</sup>

The Spencers, on the other hand, could quietly save and consolidate. It has also been argued that fortuitous marriage was as important as sheep farming in building up their wealth but Dr Finch dismisses this idea, pointing out that without wealth they would not have been able to command the favourable marriages.<sup>105</sup> It is true, however, that marriage did give them access to additional sources of finance, through commerce, and the law, and heiresses made a considerable contribution to their family fortune.

Whatever weight one puts on various contributing influences, the fact remains that from the latter part of the fifteenth century, into the first half of the sixteenth, the Spencers made quite spectacular progress in the accumulation of wealth and social position, and continued to do so in the centuries to follow. They were fortunate in producing an unbroken line of male heirs and even the wardship of John III presented no problems to the estate.

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<sup>104</sup> Finch, p. 63.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

## **PATTERNS AND RELATIONSHIPS**

Having set out the evidence for changes in the wealth and social standing of ten Northamptonshire families, it is now time to analyse the findings and, maybe, draw conclusions. How did families actually achieve advancement and were some avenues more popular and profitable than others? How important were considerations of class - did ancient lineage matter or was wealth the key to social advancement and eligibility in the marriage market? Did marriage bind families together into a community or did it extend family horizons across the country? What evidence is there for the way that families managed their own affairs and their relationships with each other? What part did religion play in the lives of the families? Are there any patterns in the timing of advancement and decline and was there a relationship to the broader political or economic scene? Was this actually a period of change and did the gentry really emerge in the sixteenth century?

### **Routes to advancement**

There seem to have been two significant ways by which a family could achieve advancement in the gentry/aristocracy hierarchy. One was the acquisition of wealth and the other the acquisition of royal favour. One of these often led to the other but the inter-relationship between them could be complex. In some cases the acquisition of wealth came first, but in others it was the

opposite with royal favour giving rise to opportunities for acquiring wealth.

Two families stand out as examples of the first situation. It was the acquisition of wealth by the Fermors and the Spencers during the second half of the fifteenth century that led to them being in positions to attract favours from Henry VIII and later monarchs. In the case of the Spencers the division between their initial wealth and receipt of favour was clear cut as they had become very wealthy before ever making an appearance on the national scene. It is not quite so obvious how the Fermors began to acquire wealth, but it certainly seems to have been before they had established a local or national position. A third family, the Grenes, might have followed a similar pattern, but it is more difficult to judge the relationship between the two factors as their wealth was accumulated during the fourteenth century. This was, however, also their most obvious period of royal favour.<sup>1</sup>

With all of the other families, the acquisition of wealth and receipt of royal favour went closely hand in hand; perhaps not from the very beginning but certainly soon after they had established themselves on the first rungs of the ladder to success. The relationship is even more obvious when one looks at their periods of problems or decline as these coincide closely with them falling out of favour for political or personal reasons. This leaves some fundamental questions to be explored. How did families acquire wealth? What brought them royal favour? How did they fall from favour? What other reasons were there for declining fortunes?

When one looks at the biographies of the ten families, two features stand out; the number of families involved in enclosure and sheep farming and the number involved in the legal profession. Even for those families selected for other apparent routes to success, such as the Fermors as merchants, one finds enclosure, sheep and the law making significant appearances. Other recurring

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<sup>1</sup> Above pp. 17-18.



features for these families, and beyond to the Northamptonshire gentry as a whole, are the number who were servants in the royal household, and the smaller, but still significant number, who were involved with the Duchy of Lancaster.

The acquisition of wealth was usually a long process; luck could play a part, such as when a man or his wife unexpectedly became the heir of a distant relative, but the building up of a fortune was usually the result of skill and hard work on the part of one or more generations. This effort might be all in a particular direction or profession or spread across a broader field. The Spencers are a good example of the former with the whole basis of their wealth being sheep farming. Even the enclosure associated with sheep was not usually their responsibility as they often bought land which had already been enclosed, thus avoiding expense and perhaps also conflict. It would appear that this single minded approach was unusual; all of the other families involved with sheep did it as a side line to another profession.

One might have expected the Fermors to follow the same path as the Spencers as Thomas Fermor I was a successful wool merchant in the fifteenth century and the wills of both of his parents indicate that the family not only traded in wool but also reared sheep for themselves.<sup>2</sup> Richard Fermor did follow the family interest in wool but concentrated on trading rather than farming and became a Merchant of the Staple, dealing in a variety of commodities in addition to wool.<sup>3</sup> His brother William chose the law as his profession though he did continue to derive a large part of his income from sheep. In 1530 he was one of England's largest woolmen and was also involved in enclosure.<sup>4</sup> The Fermors thus had a three pronged approach to acquiring wealth - sheep, trade and the law.

<sup>2</sup> PRO, PCC 19 Logge, PCC 22 Moone; Above, pp. 81-82.

<sup>3</sup> Above, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> Above, p. 87.

Another family with at least some interest in sheep were the Knightleys.

Their pursuance of a policy of enclosure on the family estates at Fawsley and at Upton led to the eventual desertion of these villages and the Knightleys grazed a large flock of 2,500 sheep at Fawsley alone.<sup>5</sup> As with William Fermor, some of the Knightleys managed to combine sheep farming with very active legal careers. This was also true of the Catesbys, who were serious farmers and making a profit from wool as early as the 1450s,<sup>6</sup> and probably true of the Mordaunts who were certainly involved in enclosure and the turning of arable land into pasture in the 1530s.<sup>7</sup>

If the *Victoria County History* version of their background is accepted then in the fourteenth century the Grenes were established wool merchants,<sup>8</sup> and while there is no actual evidence of them keeping sheep in the fifteenth century, it would seem likely as they were certainly involved in the creation of sheep walks, destroying houses in several hamlets around Greens Norton in the process.<sup>9</sup> By the middle of the sixteenth century the resulting enclosures supported 2,000 sheep kept by William Hickling.<sup>10</sup> Sir Nicholas Vaux, who succeeded to the Grene estate in the right of his wife, continued the process of enclosure on his own behalf but his main career was as a royal servant and courtier. Sir Thomas Tresham also had some involvement with enclosure and sheep farming. He bought pasture sufficient for three hundred sheep in 1544,<sup>11</sup> but farming does not seem to have been a real interest as much of his land was occupied by tenants.

Evidence is lacking as to whether the remaining two families, the Empsons and Parrs, added to their wealth through sheep farming, but Richard Empson certainly kept cattle, as evidenced by their alleged incursion of a

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<sup>5</sup> Above, p. 104.

<sup>6</sup> Above, p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> Above, p. 54.

<sup>8</sup> Above, pp. 16-17; *VCH Northants* iii, p. 190.

<sup>9</sup> Above, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Above, pp. 136-38.

churchyard in 1510.<sup>12</sup> The Parrs seem to have been heavily involved with activities that took them away from their country estates, but that does not necessarily mean that the land was not farmed on their behalf.

The involvement of at least eight out of ten families with sheep farming and enclosure does suggest that these activities made an important contribution to family wealth. Wright suggests that there was more direct farming by the gentry than has been supposed, with real opportunities for families to prosper in the late fifteenth century.<sup>13</sup> The Spencers are a good example of just how profitable this enterprise could be, given the necessary skill and determination. From comparatively small beginnings they made large profits in a very short space of time.

Connections with the law are even more obvious than with sheep as seven out of ten families had very definite legal backgrounds. Perhaps this is not surprising when one remembers that at least some legal training was part of the normal education for land owning families, with entry to one of the Inns of Court an alternative form of higher education. Like universities, the Inns were places where contacts were made and friendships established which could help to further a young man's fortune or career. Apart from these undoubted benefits, managing an estate was a complex business even in those days and knowledge of the law was probably a necessity. What is clear, however, is that many men took their legal training beyond their own education and practised the law in at least a semi-professional capacity. Being a lawyer became one of the few socially acceptable professions with lawyers recognised as, and usually calling themselves, 'gentlemen'. In a country where primogeniture meant that the eldest son inherited the bulk of the family estate, it was obviously particularly important that younger sons had the means of making a living, but some families went beyond this and made the law almost a family business with father and eldest

<sup>12</sup> Above p. 73; PRO S/P 1/1 61, pp. 161-163.

<sup>13</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 143.

son practising professionally as well as managing the family estate.

Apart from its social acceptability, the legal profession was popular because of the opportunities it presented "... as a means of acquiring that solvent of social barriers - hard cash - it had few rivals".<sup>14</sup> Lawyers were in a position to know when property and wardships were about to come onto the market and were, therefore, able to get in early bids on their own behalf. Their work also brought them into contact with men of wealth and influence, including the king himself. It has been suggested that lawyers did particularly well in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries because of the legal problems arising from attainders and deaths of landowners during the Wars of the Roses, but the evidence of this study does not entirely support that proposition. On the one hand the problems over rightful heirs simply did not arise on the scale suggested, and on the other hand it does not seem to have been a new phenomenon to become wealthy as a practising lawyer. Perhaps a more plausible reason for the rise of lawyers came a century earlier when the various plagues did result in many intestate sudden deaths and the wiping out of whole families which led to complicated claims over ownership of land and property.<sup>15</sup>

We certainly need to go back to the fourteenth century to find the obvious Grene family connection with the law. Sir Henry Grene was possibly the younger son of a wool merchant and as such needed to carve out a career for himself.<sup>16</sup> He seems to have been very successful and eventually came to the notice of the royal family. He was probably an advocate to Queen Isabella and was apparently favoured by her son, Edward III, who made him Chief Justice of England in 1361. By his death, in 1369, Henry Grene was a very wealthy man, but whether this

<sup>14</sup> Ives, *The Common Lawyers*, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Thomson suggests that the emergence of the law as a means of social advancement coincided with the decline of military service as the most common route and that this was the combination of an absence of continental wars after 1453 and an increase in the complexity and technicality of the law itself. J.A.F. Thomson, *The Transformation of Medieval England 1370-1529* (London, 1983), pp. 130-31, 292-93.

<sup>16</sup> Above, p. 17.

was the result of royal favour, his legal abilities or his excellent marriage is not clear; it was probably a combination of all three. His younger son went on to enjoy the favour of Richard II but it is not certain whether his service was legal or military. Evidence is similarly scant for the senior line, but there is some suggestion that they continued as lawyers with Thomas Grene III or IV being associated with men such as Robert Catesby and Thomas Billing in witnessing legal transactions,<sup>17</sup> and Thomas Grene VI was linked with the successful lawyers, Richard Empson and William Catesby.<sup>18</sup>

It is possible that Richard Empson followed his father's example in becoming a lawyer as Peter Empson was involved on several occasions in property dealing in Towcester as a feoffee or witness; often indications of someone acting in a legal capacity. Richard himself was certainly a practising lawyer by 1473 and undoubtedly a successful one, as indicated by his own purchases of land and property. Patronage initially played an important role in his advancement, possibly by William Catesby or Sir Reginald Bray,<sup>19</sup> but once established, his own ability ensured his professional progress. Royal favour was the key to his spectacular rise; initially by Edward IV, who in 1478 made him Attorney General of the Duchy of Lancaster, but more particularly by Henry VII. Richard made the most of his opportunities and by 1499 had sufficient wealth and land to create his own estate and deer park.<sup>20</sup>

Richard Empson is probably the most striking example of just how quickly an able lawyer could rise to wealth and royal favour, but other families similarly used the law for advancement. Over a slightly longer period of time the Catesbys followed the same route, with John Catesby II founding a dynasty of lawyers who built up land in Warwickshire and Northamptonshire. Local influence and powerful patronage, including that of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick,

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<sup>17</sup> Above, p. 30.

<sup>18</sup> Above, pp. 32-33.

<sup>19</sup> Above, pp. 64, 66.

<sup>20</sup> Above, pp. 69-70.

eventually brought royal favour, especially for William Catesby under Richard III, which in its turn brought increased wealth and position. Unfortunately for William Catesby, Richard's reign was short lived and the main Catesby line suffered from the downfall of the House of York. The cadet line at Whiston, in contrast, continued to enjoy royal favour and became wealthy enough to build a particularly fine church in 1534.<sup>21</sup>

The father of John Mordaunt I also saw the potential of the law and sent his son for legal training. John junior proved to be an able lawyer and soon enjoyed the patronage of Richard Neville, by now the Earl of Warwick. Royal favour followed under Henry VII, culminating in a knighthood in 1502/3 and the position of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1504. John II also used his skill to build up his own wealth; probably resorting to dubious practices on occasions as in the case of the will of Edward, Earl of Wiltshire. His son, John Mordaunt, III continued in the same vein, with the same skill and, apparently, the same ruthlessness. He saw the tangled case of the Earl of Wiltshire's will through to a successful conclusion for his own benefit as he had been married as a child to one of the eventual heiresses.<sup>22</sup> Royal favour continued and probably played an important part in the increase of his wealth by various official appointments and the chance to purchase the marriage of the heiress Ellen Fitzlewis for his son. Favour also brought social advancement when he was elevated to the peerage in 1532 as a baron. His descendants do not seem to have followed him into the legal profession and it is perhaps significant that his son and grandson managed to spend some of the family fortune rather than adding to it.

Another family to combine legal skill with ruthlessness and sharp practice were the Knightleys of Fawsley. In the second half of the fifteenth century, Richard Knightley III became a lawyer in the Middle Temple, but it is possible that he was not the first member of the family to enter into the legal profession. The

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<sup>21</sup> Above, pp. 122-29.

<sup>22</sup> Above, pp. 46-49, 44-45..

Knightleys were already substantial landowners and Richard continued to add to the estate. He was knighted in 1494, but this was probably in recognition of his local importance rather than a reward for legal services, as there is no evidence of him acting in a professional capacity for any powerful patrons or for the royal household. His sons, Richard and Edmund, both followed him in training at the Middle Temple but it was particularly Edmund who went on to use his legal skill for financial reward. He worked hard to build up a network of contacts and supporters which were to be useful when his dubious methods brought him problems with officialdom.<sup>23</sup> Apart from appointments to commissions, however, the Knightleys never enjoyed the obvious royal favour of some of their fellow Northamptonshire lawyers. It seems to have been their own skill, sometimes combined with sharp practice, that enabled them to use the law to advance their wealth.

It was actually as lawyers that the Vauxes began to make their mark in the second half of the fourteenth century. William Vaux was a lawyer in Northampton and it is likely that his son, and possibly his grandson, followed the same profession. They were clearly successful and began to climb the social ladder by becoming landowners with an estate at Harrowden.<sup>24</sup> Official appointments as Sheriffs, Justices of the Peace and Escheators in Northamptonshire and in neighbouring counties give an indication of their rising status. The Wars of the Roses and their Lancastrian loyalty put a temporary end to this state of affairs, and when they were eventually re-established after Bosworth they turned to military and diplomatic service rather than the law. This proved to be a successful change of direction as they were rewarded with various appointments and eventually elevated to the peerage.

The law was not a tradition with the Fermor family, but William Fermor, and probably also his brother Richard, were sent to the Inner Temple. For Richard this

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<sup>23</sup> Above, pp. 112-13.

<sup>24</sup> Above, p. 140.

was just a part of his general education, but William Fermor chose to practise professionally, in spite of the income he already derived from sheep farming. He soon received official appointments and in 1508 was made Clerk to the Crown and King's Attorney for life. Later in his life he became an agent and protegee of Thomas Cromwell, but his early patrons are unknown. He was a wealthy man before becoming a lawyer which, perhaps, enabled him to buy patronage.

It is obvious that the law provided a good starting point for advancing family fortunes. Ives suggests that under Yorkist and Tudor monarchs, England was "... intensively 'law minded', obsessed with legal considerations, legal rights and legal remedies" with much of this preoccupation "... in part the consequences of the complexity and fluidity of property ownership in late medieval England".<sup>25</sup> The law was also involved in the more domestic arrangements of marriage settlements, bonds, indentures and obligations and lawyers did not confine themselves to legal matters "Whatever required a professional manager was opportunity for them".<sup>26</sup> They were frequently employed as stewards of estates and seemed to be favoured candidates for local offices as many of them became Sheriffs and Members of Parliament.

For men who capitalised on their legal abilities and moved on to the judiciary, there were other rewards. S.J. Payling reminds us that judicial salaries themselves were high in the fifteenth century. He also suggests that "... judges were in a uniquely advantageous position to exploit the local land market". On the one hand they had the ready money to make the purchases in the first place, and on the other hand they had the legal training and social position to defend themselves against rival claimants.<sup>27</sup> Northamptonshire's lawyers were particularly successful on the judicial scene. There was usually one county representative and sometimes two on the list that Ives produced of twenty to thirty

<sup>25</sup> Ives, *Common Lawyers*, pp.7-8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> S.J. Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England: The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire* (Oxford, 1991), p. 31.



senior members of the legal profession from 1461 to 1510.<sup>28</sup> In 1461 Thomas Billing was already a King's Serjeant, he was promoted to the King's Bench in 1464 and became Chief Justice of the Bench in 1469, a position that he held until his death in 1481. He was joined in 1463 when John Catesby, a Serjeant-at-Law, was promoted to King's Serjeant in 1469 and to a Justice of Common Pleas in 1481 until his death in 1487. There was a gap until 1503 when Robert Brudenell was appointed Serjeant-at-Law, but John Mordaunt of Bedfordshire had been appointed both Serjeant-at-Law and King's Serjeant in November 1495.

Even at a local level there were opportunities for lawyers to increase their wealth, as demonstrated by men like William Vaux and Richard Empson, but for men of ambition the real value of legal skill was the opportunity and patronage it brought on a wider front. It is not always possible to identify the early patrons of rising families, but Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, and the Duke of Buckingham possibly figured in the rise of William Catesby, who then moved on to William, Lord Hastings.<sup>29</sup> John Mordaunt almost certainly had the patronage of a later Earl of Warwick, Richard Neville, and also the Duchess of Bedford, but his most significant patron was undoubtedly Reginald Bray.<sup>30</sup> His son, Lord Mordaunt, later tried to enlist the support of Cardinal Wolsey but without much obvious success. William Catesby himself is one of several candidates for having promoted the interests of the young Richard Empson, but during the reign of Richard III Catesby seems to have turned against him (to Empson's good fortune) and it was probably Reginald Bray who recommended Empson to Henry VII.<sup>31</sup> Thomas Cromwell took an interest in the career of William Fermor and was possibly also involved in Knightley fortunes - they certainly approached him for

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Appendix E.

<sup>29</sup> Above, p. 120-22.

<sup>30</sup> Above, pp. 40-41.

<sup>31</sup> Above, p. 68.

help on more than one occasion.<sup>32</sup>

The Duchy of Lancaster also featured quite prominently in the careers of several Northamptonshire's lawyers.<sup>33</sup> In 1443 Sir William Tresham and his son Thomas were made joint stewards of Higham Ferrers for life. A year later William was made Apprentice-at-Law for the Duchy and in 1449 he finally became Chancellor of the same; a position he had been promised as early as 1442 on the next vacancy. He did not live long to enjoy the position as he was murdered in 1450.

From 1455 to 1466 a John Grene was also an Apprentice-at-Law and in 1469 he was deputy steward of the Southern parts of the Duchy, but any relationship to the Northamptonshire Grene is uncertain. John Catesby was made a Serjeant-at-Law in 1478 and his nephew, William Catesby was appointed Apprentice-at-Law in 1481. On the usurpation of Richard III one of the offices given to William Catesby was steward of Higham Ferrers.

As early as 1477 Richard Empson was appointed to the office of Attorney General for the Duchy and very actively pursued Duchy interests.<sup>34</sup> This continued until the usurpation of Richard III when he was removed from office and demoted to Apprentice-at-Law. He was reinstated as Attorney General when Henry VII took the throne and remained in office until 1505, adding the positions of steward in Warwickshire, the stewardship of Kenilworth (shared with the then Chancellor, Reginald Bray), steward of Deddington and Ascot in 1493 and of Sutton and Potton in 1504. In 1505 he was elevated to Chancellor, a position he held until the accession of Henry VIII, and in 1507 the stewardship of Higham Ferrers was added.

In 1498 John Mordaunt was made a Serjeant-at-Law and in 1504 he replaced Sir Reginald Bray as Chancellor for life, but died a few months later.

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<sup>32</sup> Above, p. 112.

<sup>33</sup> Somerville.

<sup>34</sup> Above, pp. 66-67.

Under Henry VII the office of Chancellor was exclusively in the hands of Northamptonshire men. Before John Mordaunt, Sir Reginald Bray himself had held the office from 1485 until his death in 1504 and as we have seen, Mordaunt was followed by Empson.

After the death of Sir Richard Empson there was something of a hiatus in the appointment of Northamptonshire men to offices in the Duchy, but in 1522 Edmund Knightley was made Attorney General and the Throckmortons began to gain stewardships, probably through the patronage of their relatives, the Parrs. Northamptonshire had to wait until 1559 for the next Chancellor who was Sir Andrew Cave of Stanford.

The heyday of Northamptonshire men holding appointments for the Duchy of Lancaster undoubtedly coincided with the influence of Sir Reginald Bray; demonstrating just how valuable even one influential patron could be. Important though patrons were, however, in furthering the fortunes of some families, they were really only stepping stones. The ultimate aim of an ambitious man was to gain access to the royal court. All favour ultimately came from the king and access to him was crucial to significant advancement. The law and the Duchy of Lancaster merely provided routes to this access. For some men, particularly Richard Empson, the Duchy was probably the key to access and consequent success, but for others, such as Sir John Mordaunt, appointment to the Chancellorship of the Duchy seems to have been a reward for services already rendered.

Office in the Duchy of Lancaster was only one way that lawyers served the Crown. Ives estimates that one third of the Commoners in Edward IV's council were common lawyers and that under Henry VII the proportion rose to two in five.<sup>35</sup> He goes on to suggest that "The pre-eminence of the Crown as an employer raises the whole problem of the legal profession and politics".<sup>36</sup> Political

<sup>35</sup> Ives, *Common Lawyers*, p. 229.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

involvement could be a very mixed blessing but could not be avoided by an ambitious lawyer. This closeness to the monarch could mean that lawyers were affected by times of political crisis. Obvious examples of this are Richard Empson in 1483 and again in 1509, and William Catesby in 1485. Fortunately the fate of these individuals was the exception rather than the rule. Lawyers were not necessarily held accountable for past actions by incoming monarchs, and usually survived.

In spite of the inherent dangers, access to the Crown was too important to ignore and was actively sought through one channel or another. Some men achieved it via direct service in the royal household or sent their children to the royal court. Northamptonshire men (and women) were well represented in Court circles and the families studied are no exception. Three of the established county families, the Catesbys, Treshams and Vauxes, held household positions over a long period of time and were later joined by the Mordaunts, Knightleys, and the rising Fermors. Two of the popular explanations put forward for these strong links are the position of Northamptonshire in relation to London, and the fact that the county was popular with medieval and Tudor monarchs because of its excellent hunting. On the other hand, the Parrs also had strong links with the royal court even when the centre of their estate was still in the North West of England.

Thomas Tresham I was brought up from childhood in the household of Henry VI and certainly profited as a young man from royal favour. As already mentioned he and his father were appointed in 1443 to share for life the stewardship of the Northamptonshire estates of the Duchy of Lancaster, while his father received the promised Chancellorship in 1449.<sup>37</sup> In 1459 Thomas was elected Speaker of the House of Commons, a position that carried the implication of royal favour and one which his father had held no fewer than four

<sup>37</sup> Griffiths suggests that membership of Henry VI's household afforded sure access to his patronage - regardless of suitability for the job.

R.A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI* (London, 1981), p. 331.

times. He benefitted too from his household service in an unusual way in that it was used under the Yorkists to excuse his Lancastrian loyalty - at least at first. His grandson was also involved in royal service as a Squire of the Body Extraordinary to Henry VIII.

Sir William Catesby and his son also served in the royal household but for different kings. Sir William was a Squire of the Household under Henry VI while his son was a Squire of the Body to Richard III. William II also had other positions including Chancellor and Chamberlain of the Exchequer and in 1484 he too was made Speaker of the House of Commons.

William Vaux III does not seem to have had any official position at Court, but he must have been a part of the royal circle in some capacity in order to have met and married Catherine, a lady-in-waiting to Margaret of Anjou.<sup>38</sup> Their son, Nicholas, was brought up in the household of Mararet Beaufort, Countess of Richmond, and their daughter became governess to Henry VII's daughters. Nicholas himself frequently attended Court under the first two Tudor kings and his son, Thomas, was a member of the Court circle before the Reformation.

In the mid-fifteenth century, the Parrs divided their time between the Court and the North West, with Sir Thomas Parr being an active Yorkist supporter. In 1461 his second son, John, was made a Squire of the Body by Edward IV and a Knight of the same at the beginning of Edward's second reign. John's eldest brother, William Parr, was made a Knight of the Garter and in 1471 appointed Comptroller of the royal household. The death of William, in 1483, and the subsequent marriage of his widow to Sir Nicholas Vaux, paved the way for William's children to be brought up in Tudor Court circles. In 1506, his second son, William, was at Court as one of the King's Spears and he was also made a Squire of the Body. Thomas, the eldest, became Comptroller of Henry VIII's Household - the same position his father had held under Edward IV.

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<sup>38</sup> Above, p. 141.

Sir John Mordaunt I was a Privy Councillor to Henry VII and his son, John II, was brought up at Court as an attendant to Prince Arthur, until the latter's death. This position would also have brought John into contact with the young Henry VIII. The Knightleys, on the other hand, did not reach court circles until well into the reign of Henry VIII; quite late for a family that had possessed wealth and local status for at least a century. Edmund Knightley was appointed Attorney General for the Duchy of Lancaster in 1522, and in 1525 his eldest brother, Richard, was made a Gentleman Usher Extraordinary. It is more understandable why the Fermors did not reach court circles until the mid-sixteenth century; as merchants they would not have been socially acceptable. The appointment of Richard Fermor's daughter, Joane, to attend on Princess Mary was perhaps an indication of their rising status.

Attendance at Court brought at least royal notice with the potential for favour to follow. It also brought contacts with other families of equal or higher status on a broader scene than the county community. These contacts themselves could bring patronage, alliances, favourable marriages and business opportunities. For children it brought the opportunity of genuine friendship with the current heir to the throne and there is evidence that these childhood friendships formed bonds that were valued by more than one monarch later in life. With seven out of ten families involved in service in the royal household, it must be considered as a significant factor in their success, but it is difficult to judge whether service brought access or the other way round.

It is apparent that advancement was usually achieved by a combination of factors. The acquisition of wealth was a vital ingredient but even this was closely associated with the essential feature of royal favour. Wealth itself was rarely acquired in only one way, and sheep farming and the law were particularly popular routes throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

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### **Marriage patterns**

Another significant feature to emerge from the family biographies is the importance of marriage, both as a major contributor to the acquisition of wealth and as an indicator of social status. Marriage was not usually a casual affair of two people falling in love, though some parents could be sensitive to the feelings of their children in this matter. It was more often a calculated business arrangement for both sides and, as such, the marriage alliances entered into by families can provide a great deal of information about their current status and future hopes. Analysis can identify groups of families whose inter-marriages provided them with networks of possible business colleagues and mutual political support. It can show whether families still looked towards their local community or whether they were part of a broader national marriage market, which in turn can indicate ambitions or importance. Marriages up or down the social hierarchy can reveal growing status or the beginnings of decline, and marriages to heiresses or wealthy widows can provide clues as to how a family had come to acquire wealth. At the same time this might indicate status and royal favour, as rich women were much sought after and at least some of them would have been under the control of the Crown.

On a broad analysis of the ten families, two contradictory features stand out. On the one hand there are clearly groups which developed strong kinship networks at a local level, but within these groups many marriages involved partners from distant parts of the country. Questions can be raised as to how these families knew each other. In some cases the answer is apparently obvious with matches between children of fellow Members of Parliament or fellow judges. The professional networks of fathers do seem to be a more significant factor than politics or religion; there are several examples of marriages across the Lancaster/Yorkist divide and, in the mid-sixteenth century, between Catholic and Protestant families.



Only those marriages where the place of origin of the bride or groom is known have been analysed and this makes a total of eighty one men and seventy eight women.<sup>39</sup> There was a slight tendency for more of the men to marry outside their own county than the women, but this is very variable between the families and many of these outside county marriages were just across the borders into neighbouring counties. Fifty one men married outside their home county (which in the early period was not always Northamptonshire) and, of these, only fifteen were into neighbouring counties. This is in contrast to forty five women marrying outside their home county, but this time the number just going to neighbouring counties was twenty one. The men's figures are rather distorted by the Grene family who had eleven out of the thirteen marriages considered outside of Northamptonshire, with nine of them to fairly distant counties. The women's figures are similarly distorted by the Vauxes with seven out of county marriages from ten, but three of these were into neighbouring counties.

Any attempt to link status to a tendency to contract marriages across the country looks doomed to failure; family trends seem to be more of a feature. The number and status of people marrying outside their own county contrasts to some degree with Carpenter's findings for Warwickshire, where she found that marriage across county boundaries tended to be confined to the higher reaches of society,<sup>40</sup> and Wright's findings for Derbyshire, where she suggested that few gentry looked further afield than their own or neighbouring counties.<sup>41</sup> The Grenees were clearly inclined to distant partners, with sixteen out of twenty five marriages, as were the Mordaunts, with fourteen out of eighteen marriages at least beyond their own county boundary. At the other end of the spectrum the Treshams, with eight out of eleven marriages within Northamptonshire, and the Catesbys, with twelve out of sixteen marriages in Warwickshire or

<sup>39</sup> See Appendix 3, p. 283.

<sup>40</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 99.

<sup>41</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 44.

Northamptonshire, were much more inclined to local partners.

It could, perhaps, be argued that the wealth of the Grenes gave them high status in the marriage market and attracted distant partners, but the Treshams had similar status and widespread opportunities through their parliamentary connections - they just seemed to prefer local marriages or were lucky enough to find suitable partners without having to go far afield. Sir Thomas married very well with his bride being the daughter of Lord Zouche of Harringworth. Their son, John, did look further afield with a bride from Lancashire, but his sister and their children and grandchildren were content with local marriages into families of similar social status as themselves; namely the Vauxes, Parrs and Catesbys, and later the Warwickshire Throckmortons, who were related by marriage to the Parrs. Perhaps the Treshams were a family who considered the preferences of the young people themselves as with local marriages there was a much greater chance that the two parties already knew each other and accepted the arrangement.

The Mordaunts (at first in Bedfordshire) and the Catesbys (at first in Warwickshire) were also families with comparable wealth and background and similar connections in the legal field, but they chose different patterns when it came to marriage. Once again luck may have played some part, with the Catesbys having no need to go far afield at first as their marriages to local heiresses were probably as advantageous as they could have hoped for: culminating in the marriage of William Catesby to Margaret, the daughter of another Lord Zouche. Perhaps the Catesbys were also concerned that the couple should be happy together. In his will, William Catesby certainly mentions his wife in loving terms, as does his grandson, Richard, of his third wife, Elizabeth.<sup>42</sup> After their fall from grace in 1485, the Catesbys probably had less choice and had to make do with much less favourable local marriages into the

<sup>42</sup>For William see - PRO, PCC 15 Logge; Richard - NRO, NPL 1032 or PRO, PCC 19 Tasche.

influential Empson family and the wealthy Spencers, who both wanted to improve their own status with Catesby lineage. In a similar period a shortage of suitable spouses in Bedfordshire may have forced William Mordaunt to look to Dorset and Essex for marriage partners for his children, but towards the end of the fifteenth century more local brides were found for the two sons of Sir John Mordaunt in the daughters of Henry Vere of Addington, heiresses to the Grenes of Drayton, Northamptonshire.<sup>43</sup>

Empson marriages were surprisingly local, given Richard's influence and contacts. It could be argued that the enmity that Richard aroused made it difficult for him to find advantageous matches for his children further afield, but it could also be that he wanted to establish himself as one of Northamptonshire's gentry and marriages into the more established Catesby, Wolston and Lovell families brought him desirable local status. The double marriage of his sisters to William and John Spencer was of mutual benefit, bringing together Empson influence and Spencer wealth.

The Spencers do conform to the expected pattern by beginning with local marriages while they were establishing their wealth and status. They moved on from the Empsons to more established families like the Catesbys and the Knightleys and then, when they had achieved recognition in their own right, they began to look further afield. The Knightleys themselves followed a similar pattern, with fairly local marriages until the middle of the sixteenth century, but for them it is more surprising as they already had wealth and lineage which should have made them attractive in a wider marriage market.

The Vauxes seem to have taken marriage partners where they could find them both within the county and beyond. They established links with several well established Northamptonshire families such as the the Grenes, Cheynes,

<sup>43</sup> Wright suggests that in the middle of the fifteenth century heiresses were in short supply because families often preferred to sell up if there was no male to inherit. *The Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 42.

Fermors and Treshams, but Sir William took a French born bride and his son a widow from Kendal. Other marriages were spread across the country, including Norfolk, Hertfordshire and Gloucestershire. Similarly there is no discernible pattern to the marriages of the Fermor family. The Oxfordshire based William Fermor had no fewer than four wives, all from different parts of the country including Essex, London and Berkshire. His brother, Richard, married the daughter of a London merchant, but then moved to Northamptonshire where his children married into the established Vaux, Mordaunt, Lovell and Knightley families, as well as some matches further afield.

The Parrs arrived in Northamptonshire as a result of the second marriage of Elizabeth, the widow of Sir William Parr, to Sir Nicholas Vaux of Harrowden. All of Elizabeth's children by her first husband married into Northamptonshire families of a similar middle ranking gentry status, as did some of her grandchildren, but the children of her eldest son went much further afield and attracted very high status marriages indeed, culminating in Catherine's marriage to Henry VIII.

In terms of family networks it is noticeable that it was the 'old' families that intermarried with the Zouches, one of Northamptonshire's two baronial families. In all cases it was upward mobility for them but there is no other indication that the Zouches themselves were declining. Towards the end of the fourteenth century Margaret Grene married William, Lord Zouche, but her father did have the status of Lord Chief Justice of England and was also very wealthy. Their granddaughter(?) Margaret, married Sir Thomas Tresham, but at the same time her brother, John Zouche, was marrying the daughter of Lord Grey of Groby. In the next generation another Margaret Zouche married William Catesby, once again a family of lower status, but the Catesbys did have a reputation as an old established family and at the time were enjoying a period of success. These marriages suggest that the gentry/nobility divisions were not as significant as has

been suggested.

With only sixty three out of one hundred and fifty nine marriages being within the county of the parties concerned, it is difficult to argue that there was a strong sense of a county community.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, a network does emerge of local families that seem to have been inclined to intermarriage over several generations and by the early years of the sixteenth century all ten families were connected by marriage.<sup>45</sup>

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, marriage into the Grene family brought together the Vauxes, Mordaunts and Parrs, while the Vauxes themselves already had links with the Treshams. The Vaux/Tresham/Parr relationships were quite complex, with Sir Thomas Tresham marrying the daughter of Sir William Parr, who was Sir Nicholas Vaux's stepson. There must have been quite an age gap as Sir Thomas and his stepfather-in-law, Sir Nicholas, were contemporaries. This was followed by a marriage between their grandchildren, William Vaux and Mary Tresham. The Vauxes occupy a pivotal position in the network as a whole as they also had links with the Fermors, who in turn were related to the Mordaunts and the Knightleys. The Knightleys and Treshams both had links with the Catesbys who themselves were intermarried with the Empsons and the Spencers.

Several other Northamptonshire families formed part of this network, most notably the Veres of Great Addington, who married into the Grene, Mordaunt and Parr families. The Cheynes of Irthlingborough had links with the Vauxes, Parrs, Grenes and Mordaunts; the Lovells of Titchmarsh with the Mordaunts and Empsons; and the Zouches from Harringworth links have already been mentioned. The geographical spread of these families takes in the whole county

<sup>44</sup> In addition it seems reasonable to assume that the origins of the unknown partners are more likely to have been from outside rather than inside the county.

<sup>45</sup> See Appendix 4, p. 287. This contrast with Payling's findings for Nottinghamshire where social connections between leading families were uncommon unless an heiress was involved. Payling, *Political Society*, p. 83.

but it is difficult to view the network as a purely county community because of its very strong links with Warwickshire (and to a lesser extent with Bedfordshire). The Catesbys and the Spencers both married fairly freely across the boundary and eventually actually settled in Northamptonshire, while the Lucys of Charlecote and the Throckmortons of Coughton also had very strong connections. The Lucys married into the Mordaunt, Empson and Catesby families and the Throckmortons into the Grenes, Catesbys, Knightleys and Treshams. The Mordaunts and Fermors were the only two out of the ten families not to have Warwickshire connections.

It would seem, however, that these families did see themselves as a coherent group. Not only did the group include all of the established substantial gentry families of the period, and extend into the nobility via the Zouches (and later the Vauxes and the Mordaunts), but it also seems to have been a network that newcomers were anxious to join. The Spencers and the Fermors were included as soon as they had reached a suitable position via wealth or status. The children of Sir John Spencer made a double marriage into the Knightley family and one into the Catesbys. Sir Richard Empson married his children into the Lovell, Catesby and Lucy families, while his eldest son married into the Wolstons, another family of similar social status but not so strongly integrated as the others. Richard Fermor signalled his arrival in the area with the marriage of his eldest son to the daughter of Sir Nicholas Vaux, while his daughters married into the Mordaunt, Knightley, Lucy and Lovell families.

There is a strong indication that wealth, rather than social status, was the qualifying factor in the arrangement of marriage partners. The clearest evidence for this is the marriage of Constance Grene to the younger son of the Duke of Buckingham. Her father was only an esquire, but a very wealthy one. In previous generations the Grenes had been a knightly family but at no stage had they even remotely approached the status of the Duke of Buckingham. For the Fermors too

it is likely that wealth smoothed their path into the local network. Their first connection was with the established and influential Vaux family when John Fermor married the daughter of Sir Nicholas. This was followed by marriages into the equally established Lucy, Lovell and Mordaunt families. As Wright points out - "Marriage without disparagement was important but the gentry and their children might marry beneath themselves if the price was right".<sup>46</sup> Wealth probably also played a part in the Spencers' acceptability, but they did not aim too high in the first instance, settling for the Catesbys, who were experiencing problems at the time, and the Knightleys, who themselves were not well established in the upper ranks of the local network. This is not to say that status was unimportant, and ancient lineage was an attraction in its own right, especially to families like the Fermors and Spencers who lacked it. The Empsons had a different sort of status and possibly owed their acceptance into established families to the influential position that Richard held under Henry VII.

On the whole, those families that were prepared to look beyond their own county were the most successful in finding heiresses and advancing in social status, though a few were lucky nearer to home. The importance to a rising, ambitious family of finding an heiress cannot be overstated and lies more in the valuable commodity of land that these women brought to the union than in actual money. The added advantage of a *local* heiress was the opportunity to consolidate rather than disperse the growing estate.

Sometimes one particularly advantageous match can be seen to be a turning point in a family's success. This was certainly true of the Grene family when the marriage of Sir Henry II to Catherine Drayton in the middle of the fourteenth century consolidated his growing wealth and made it possible for him to set up his younger son as well as his elder son and heir. Catherine inherited the family land around Lowick, Northamptonshire, and in other places, from her

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<sup>46</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 44.

brother, and this estate went to Henry Grene III.<sup>47</sup> Drayton House itself was included in this inheritance and seems to have been a particularly important acquisition. It was clearly the value of this estate that nearly a century later was so attractive to the Duke of Buckingham. The ancestral lands of the Grene family had passed to Sir Henry's elder son, Thomas, who had to go as far as Lincolnshire to find an heiress. This seems to have set the trend for more distant brides for this line of the family and several of these women brought status or wealth to these Grene families.

Fermor fortunes similarly took an upturn when Thomas Fermor of Langford and Witney, Oxfordshire, married Emmotte, who was not only the heiress of her father, Simkin Hervey, but also the widow of the wealthy Henry Wenman of Witney. Richard Fermor, one of the sons of Thomas and Emmotte, eventually moved to Northamptonshire and Richard's eldest son, John, married Maude Vaux. Although Maude was not an heiress she brought lineage and local status, which at that stage was more important than money or land to the wealthy Fermors. A younger son, Thomas, ensured his own position by marriage to two consecutive heiresses. The first was the widow of Edward Raleigh of Farthinghoe, Northamptonshire, and heiress of her father, Thomas Horde of Bridgenorth, Shropshire. His second wife was Bridget, the daughter of Sir Henry Bradshaw of Buckinghamshire and heiress to the Bradshaw estate in Shropshire. Bridget was also a widow and it is possibly significant that families who were not well established had to resort to widows for their brides. Of the four wives of Richard's brother, William, at least one and probably more were also widows.

John Catesby improved his prospects by marrying Isobel, the daughter and coheiress of William Grant of Snitterfield. Until then most of the Spencer land had been rented from other people. Margaret Montfort likewise brought Lapworth

<sup>47</sup> It is significant that it was the land that Sir Henry Grene had acquired by marriage that went to his younger son.



to John Catesby II as a valuable addition to his estate. Both Thomas Fermor and John Catesby had found wealthy brides close to home, but the Mordaunt brothers of Turvey, Bedfordshire, had to travel further afield to make the family's first really significant matches. John Mordaunt I married Edith, the daughter and coheiress of Sir Nicholas Latimer of Dorset, while his younger brother married an Essex heiress, Anne Huntingdon. John Mordaunt II found his heiress, Elizabeth Vere, just across the border in Northamptonshire, and his brother married her sister Anne. The girls were amongst four coheiresses to the fortune of the Grenes of Drayton.<sup>48</sup> The Mordaunts continued to make advantageous matches when John III married Ellen Fitzlewis, heiress to her father, and then made a second marriage to the daughter of the wealthy Richard Fermor.<sup>49</sup>

The Vaux family did well in the marriage market with three out of four generations finding heiresses. Towards the end of the fourteenth century, the lawyer, William Vaux, married the daughter and heiress of Sir Thomas Drakelow of Wilby, Northamptonshire, but his son went further afield to find Maude Lucy who was a coheiress of her brother. The third generation William did not find an heiress but he did marry Catherine, who waited on Margaret of Anjou; a match that was to prove just as advantageous in the longer term as it kept the family firmly in the Lancastrian camp. His son, Nicholas, married two heiresses. The first was a distant bride, Elizabeth, the daughter and heiress of Lord Fitzhugh and widow of Sir William Parr of Kendal, but he found his second wife closer to home in the elder daughter and coheiress of his long time acquaintance, Sir Thomas Grene.

As a direct result of Sir Nicholas Vaux's first marriage, all three sons of Sir William Parr found Northamptonshire heiresses. Sir Thomas, the eldest, married the sister of his stepmother and coheiress of their father, Sir Thomas Grene of

<sup>48</sup> Above, pp. 44-45.

<sup>49</sup> The legal families seem to have been particularly fortunate in finding heiresses; perhaps because they were in a position to know who was available.

Greens Norton; John, the youngest, married Constance Vere who was one of the coheiresses of the Grenes of Drayton; and William married Mary, the daughter and heiress of William Salisbury of Horton. Their daughter, Anne Salisbury, brought the Treshams their only heiress. Unlike most of the other families, the Treshams had little success in the market for heiresses. Perhaps their apparent unwillingness to look beyond the county boundary had something to do with this as it was bound to reduce their options.<sup>50</sup> Richard Empson, on the other hand managed to find heiresses for his two sons in the daughters of Sir Guy Wolston and Henry Lovell, with the added advantages of them being both fairly local and well established.

As far as heiresses were concerned, the Knightleys had mixed success. Sir Richard Knightley III married the daughter and heiress of Henry Skinnerton of Alderton, Northamptonshire, but his eldest son and grandson brought assets to the family in other ways by marrying the daughters of wealthy newcomers to the county, Jane Spencer and Mary Fermor respectively. Their fathers probably made substantial settlements in return for the Knightley lineage. The real triumph of the Knightleys is difficult to explain; the marriage of Sir Richard's third son, Edmund, to Ursula, the daughter of Sir George Vere and sister and coheiress of her brother John, the fourteenth Earl of Oxford. The Knightleys own position, even with the rather limited favour shown to Edmund, hardly seems to warrant this match.<sup>51</sup>

Questions must be asked about the part that patronage and royal favour played in whether or not a family acquired an heiress to add to its estate. Marriages involving widows and wards are the ones most likely to come into this category as these women needed the permission of the Crown in the first

<sup>50</sup> This could be an example of the situation that Payling found in Nottinghamshire where the longer established families were less avid in the search for heiresses than newly risen men. Payling, *Political Society*, p. 80.

<sup>51</sup> He was Attorney General for the Duchy of Lancaster 1522-26 and Serjeant-at-Law in 1532.

instance<sup>52</sup> and their guardians in the second in order to marry. In the case of men holding land by knight service these wardships initially went to the Crown and were then sold to favoured individuals.

Spencer prestige was rising when John Spencer IV married the daughter and heir of Sir Robert Catlin, Lord Chief Justice, and the Mordaunts were certainly enjoying a period of royal favour when John III was said to have purchased, from Henry VIII, the marriage of the heiress Ellen Fitzlewis for his son Lewis at an easy rate.<sup>53</sup> John's grandfather had presumably also needed royal favour, possibly through the influence of his friend Reginald Bray, to be granted the wardship and marriage of the Vere heiresses by Henry VII. The marriage of John Tresham to Elizabeth Harrington was probably more of a favour to the Yorkist James Harrington, as the groom's father had been executed after the Battle of Tewksbury. Edward IV may also have seen this match as another way of changing the Lancastrian loyalty of the Tresham heir, whose widowed mother had already been remarried to the Yorkist Sir William Peche. Harrington himself was probably speculating on the possibility of recovering the Tresham estate, when and if the attainder of Thomas Tresham I was reversed, as well as acquiring the ancient Tresham lineage for his heirs.

The Tresham case illustrates the part played by the Crown in the wardship and marriage of heirs as well as heiresses. The situation could be manipulated for political as well as monetary gain. A similar, but reverse situation arose a few years later, when the Lancastrian Sir Nicholas Vaux was granted the marriage of Elizabeth Fitzhugh, heir to her father but widow of the staunchly Yorkist Sir William Parr. The Crown's power over under age heirs is also seen in John Stafford's will where he asks the King not to marry his son below the rank of

<sup>52</sup>The control of the Crown over widows can be seen in the case of Maude Grene, the widow of Sir Thomas IV who married Richard Middleton without permission. As a result her dower was taken away from her and only restored on the payment of a fine.

<sup>53</sup> Above, p. 56.

baron.<sup>54</sup>

Sir Richard Empson acquired heiresses for both of his sons during a period of royal favour, but the marriage of his daughter to George Catesby, a ward of the Crown, brings evidence that money was also part of the transaction as far as Henry VII was concerned. Empson needed a loan of 200 marks from his nephew, John Spencer, in order to help recover the Catesby estate. Money was very obviously important when Sir Nicholas Vaux was prepared to pay Henry VII a substantial sum for the Grene heiresses. He originally promised £6,000 but eventually paid only one third of this sum.<sup>55</sup> Money, combined with favour, also played a part in the granting of the marriage of the under age heir, John Spencer III, to Sir Thomas Kitson, a wealthy merchant. Kitson had already been involved in lending money to the Crown and marriage into the equally wealthy Spencer family was presumably his reward.

It was not only the Crown, however, that was prepared to sell the wardships and marriages of heirs; fathers sometimes did this in their own lifetimes. In 1497, John Mordaunt purchased the wardship and marriage of William Feteplace from Feteplace senior, on the understanding that William would marry one of Mordaunt's kin. The cost to John Mordaunt only seems to have been an estate worth 5 marks, but meanwhile Mordaunt was to feed and clothe the young William and see that he received schooling. In this transaction John Mordaunt was probably gambling on future prospects as the inheritance of Feteplace's wife was at that time disputed. Being a shrewd businessman, Mordaunt made sure that the contract stipulated that if William Feteplace should die then the arrangement would apply to the next heir, whether son or daughter; an important safeguard at a time of uncertain life expectancy.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, Sir Richard Catesby sold the wardship and marriage of his son,

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<sup>54</sup> NRO, SS 3967.

<sup>55</sup> Above, p. 55.

<sup>56</sup> NRO, SS 2599.

William, to William Willington, whose eight daughters were coheirs of his estate. The marriage contract was eventually concluded when both parties were only fourteen, and apparently against the wishes of young William who more than once refused the marriage which eventually took place in 1542. The speculative nature of marriage applied particularly to heiresses when their father was still alive. The mother may have been safely past child bearing age, but if she should die and the father remarry, then who knew what might happen. The Duke of Buckingham was very conscious of this danger and built safeguards into his contract with Henry Grene as to the size of settlement for Constance if Henry should have a male heir.<sup>57</sup> In the event these were unnecessary and Constance duly inherited the whole estate, but George Throckmorton was not so lucky when he married Katherine, a daughter and coheir presumptive of Sir Nicholas Vaux. Sir Nicholas did have a son by his second wife, but fortunately for Throckmorton his marriage contract stipulated that in this event Vaux's settlement on Katherine would increase substantially from £183 by a further 1,000 marks.<sup>58</sup>

Increasing their overall estate was the main aim of all families, but another important consideration came a close second - that of consolidation. In this respect marriage undoubtedly played a part, sometimes through double marriages, but more often by matches being set up between stepchildren. Five of the families were involved in double marriages. In two cases a brother and a sister of one family married a sister and brother of another. The Spencer heir, William II, married Susan Knightley while his sister, Jane, married Susan's eldest brother, Richard Knightley IV. Similarly Sir Thomas Tresham II's eldest son, John, married Eleanor Catesby and John's sister married the heir to the Whiston Catesby estate. The Spencers were involved in another double marriage, but this time it was two brothers who married Richard Empson's sisters. In all of these cases the men involved were the heirs to a family estate.

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<sup>57</sup> NRO, SS 4254.

<sup>58</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 114.

Six families were involved in some way with the marriage of step-children and, once again, one of the parties was usually an heir or heiress. One instance involved three of the ten families when Sir Nicholas Vaux and his stepson, Thomas Parr, married the daughters and coheiresses of Sir Thomas Grene. William Tresham and Laurence Fermor were both married to daughters of their fathers' second wives, which kept any land or money settled on these girls within the family. John Mordaunt III tried to do the same with his son Lewis and his stepdaughter, but his own father thwarted the plan.<sup>59</sup> In the final case it was the under age William Catesby V who was married to the niece of his stepfather, Anthony Throckmorton. It is difficult to judge which side got the best deal from these matches, often they seem to have been in the interest of both parties (though Sir John Mordaunt II obviously did not think so).

If liaisons with relatives account for a significant number of marriages, then professional relationships were responsible for another group. Sir Henry Grene's bride Catherine was the daughter of a fellow judge, Sir John Drayton; William Tresham married the daughter of a fellow Member of Parliament, William Vaux; and Sir Nicholas Vaux acquired the marriages of the daughter of Sir Thomas Grene, a fellow royal servant, for himself and his stepson Thomas Parr. Joan Empson's first husband, Henry Sothill, was a colleague of her father and Richard Fermor married the sister of his business partner, William Browne. It is not clear how John Mordaunt came to be temporarily granted the estate of Sir Nicholas Latimer, but he went on to marry Latimer's daughter Edith.

As well as marriage sometimes giving clues as to how a family had acquired some of its wealth, marriage settlements themselves can provide evidence of a family's current financial situation. The bride's family usually offered a substantial dowry to the groom who, in return, set aside an estate of specified value which would provide for the bride if she was widowed. At the

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<sup>59</sup> Above, p. 58.

upper end of the scale the value of Constance Grene and the wealth of the Stafford family can be seen in the Duke of Buckingham's willingness to set up an estate worth 400 marks a year plus a further annuity of 300 marks for the couple. In addition he agreed to bear all of the costs of the marriage but he did specify that after the marriage he should have the "rule and government" of Constance.<sup>60</sup>

Between 1520 and 1542, John Mordaunt II had the expense of marriage settlements for no fewer than six daughters with most of them ranging from 440 to 600 marks.<sup>61</sup> The total cost to him was approximately 3,000 marks. In return the jointures set up for the couples by the fathers of the grooms were of land worth between £40 and £50 a year for all except the last daughter to be married; she only got an estate worth £26. 13s. 4d in spite of the 440 marks put up by her father. There was little to choose in wealth and social status between the bridegrooms, the variations in settlement seem to be more a matter of what deal could be negotiated. These settlements were well in excess of the £10 to £20 which Wright found was common in fifteenth-century Derbyshire.<sup>62</sup> Either John Mordaunt drove a hard bargain or there had been a general increase in the average rates.

With only two daughters to provide for, Sir Thomas Parr III was able to leave £800 between them in his will of 1518.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, in 1523 Sir Nicholas Vaux left £500 to each of his daughters by his second wife<sup>64</sup> and the wealth of the Spencers by the 1550s can be judged by the fact that Sir John III probably spent around £6,000 in marrying off his six daughters; three times as much as John Mordaunt.<sup>65</sup> These sums would put all of these families into Carpenter's more prosperous family category.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> NRO, SS 4254.

<sup>61</sup> Above, p. 55.

<sup>62</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 32.

<sup>63</sup> PRO, PCC 32 Alenger.

<sup>64</sup> PRO, PCC 11 Redfelde. Those of his first marriage being presumably already married.

<sup>65</sup> This estimate by Dr. Finch was based on the one known settlement of £1,000.

<sup>66</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p.108.

The Knightleys demonstrate a more ruthless attitude to the marriage of daughters. Maintaining the entailed estate was of primary importance and, by the terms of Sir Richard Knightley III's will, male heirs were only allowed to pay their daughters 100 marks.<sup>67</sup> His wife Joan's will, however, does indicate the existence of choice for women as she left 100 marks to each of her granddaughters by her daughter Susan and William Spencer, but only if "they be rulyed in thear marriage by my dowter".<sup>68</sup> Her will also indicates the importance of marrying men with the wherewithal to keep them, for if they chose husbands worth less than £100 a year than they lost the 100 marks. A strong incentive one might think to choose wisely but Dorothy Spencer went ahead and married the one person her grandmother specifically forbade - her kinsman Thomas Spencer - and presumably forfeited the money. Similarly, Valentine Knightley left 500 marks to his daughter, Anne, if she married with the consent of his executors otherwise she was only to receive 200 marks.<sup>69</sup>

The marriage settlements of the Mordaunt family give a clear picture of the complex arrangements involved in what was a legal contract. There were some concessions to the feelings of the couples concerned as their agreement and assent were sought before the marriage took place, but whether this was standard wording rather than representing a real choice is impossible to determine as all of the marriages went ahead without apparent hindrance. With so many daughter to marry off these settlements represented a big drain on John Mordaunt's estate, but the effects were reduced by payment being spread over a number of years.<sup>70</sup> Usually 100 marks was paid at the sealing of the contract and the rest paid at the rate of 100 marks a year on a specified saint's day (a different

<sup>67</sup> NRO, Northamptonshire and Rutland Wills, 1st series, Book E 118.

<sup>68</sup> NRO, Northamptonshire and Rutland Wills, 1st series, Book G 128. William Spencer was already dead.

<sup>69</sup> NRO, YZ5545.

<sup>70</sup> Lloyd Bonfield graphically describes younger sons and daughters as 'surplus children'.

L. Bonfield, "Affective Families", "Open Elites" and Family Settlements in Early Modern England', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 39, p. 344.



one for each contract). This spread the payment over four to six years and the marriages themselves were spread over more than twenty years.<sup>71</sup> Usually each parent contracted to clothe their own offspring for the wedding in a manner appropriate to their 'degree', but it varied as to which father bore the cost of the wedding itself. John Mordaunt paid all costs for Edith and Winifred, but John Cheyne's father was to bear the costs, not only of the wedding itself, but for two days after.

John Mordaunt continued to take precautions against the premature death of a significant member of one of the families involved. If one of his daughters died within a few years of the wedding and before producing children, John Mordaunt was able to reclaim some of his outlay. In the case of Edith dying within three years he was to have returned from her husband John Elmes, 200 of his 500 marks outlay within two years.<sup>72</sup> In the event of a second marriage, John Elmes was restricted to providing a jointure on his new wife to £50 or less and he was not allowed to dispose of any inherited land; presumably to protect the interests of children already produced by Edith. Wright suggests that contracts often allowed substitutes if one party died as this saved the need to repay portions.<sup>73</sup> This was certainly true of Mordaunt's contract with John Feteplace. The original contract was for the eldest son, Edmund Feteplace, but it stipulated that if Edmund should die then the arrangement would apply to the next heir.<sup>74</sup>

The Duke of Buckingham took similar safeguards in the marriage agreement for his son, John, and the heiress Constance Grene. If Henry Grene had any other heir, which was possible if his wife died and he remarried, then he had to leave land worth at least £100 to Constance, and Henry was forbidden from making any will to contradict this. In the event of John Stafford dying before he had produced an heir to the Grene estate, then his father retained a say in

<sup>71</sup> NRO, SS 3309, 3383, 3384.

<sup>72</sup> NRO, SS 3378.

<sup>73</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>74</sup> NRO, SS 3309.

any future marriage of Constance.<sup>75</sup>

Problems could also arise if the groom's mother substantially outlived her husband, as a widow's dower was traditionally one third of the estate. Wright suggests that this was not always kept to<sup>76</sup> and certainly Michael Fisher was restricted by the actual marriage settlement to leaving his wife a jointure of only £60.<sup>77</sup> For six years after the marriage of his son he could also leave his wife the residue of his estate, but if six years were up by the time Michael died, then the estate went straight to his son. An even clearer example is shown by Edward Stafford's will when he particularly asks his wife not to take the full one third of his estate income in order that his debts might be covered.<sup>78</sup>

In some cases the jointure set up for a young couple was specifically in fee simple which meant that it descended to the eldest male in succession and was then divided equally among females.<sup>79</sup> None of the Mordaunt contracts were in the more restrictive 'tail male' where the estate would go to a brother in preference to female children. John Mordaunt was presumably too shrewd to let this happen to any potential granddaughters and he was in a strong position to bargain as all of the families that he was dealing with were probably of lower social status. His personal intervention in the contracts can be seen through the documents themselves as most of them have alterations and additions in his own handwriting.<sup>80</sup> Wright suggests that setting up 'tail male' estates showed a concern for lineage and the family name.<sup>81</sup> This might not be important to the father of the bride, but it was certainly the case with the Knightley family as the Fawsley estate was specifically entailed to male heirs, and in the event passed to three brothers, even though the eldest son had several daughters.

<sup>75</sup> NRO, SS 4254.

<sup>76</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 32.

<sup>77</sup> NRO, SS 3380.

<sup>78</sup> NRO, SS 4015.

<sup>79</sup> See the marriage settlement between John Mordaunt and John More - NRO, SS 3384.

<sup>80</sup> NRO, eg. SS 3384.

<sup>81</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 35.

While it was expected that fathers would provide for the marriages of daughters, the same was not necessarily true of younger sons. By the marriage contract that Robert Cheyne made for his elder son with John Mordaunt's daughter, Winifred, Cheyne was only allowed to give land worth £20 to his younger son and even this was only for life.<sup>82</sup> Similarly John Feteplace could only leave a total of £40 to his other children in the time before his eldest son was twenty one, or for ten years if Edmund died before he was of age. Once the ten years were up he could only leave land worth 10 marks a year to any son and, once again, that was only for life.<sup>83</sup> John Mordaunt himself seems at first sight to have been more generous with his own third son, William, when he agreed to buy the wardship and marriage of the heiress Agnes Bothe for him "...for the greate and entyer naturall love that he hathe and bearithe", but John was to take the profits from the estate until he got his money back, with William only getting 40 marks a year during that time.<sup>84</sup>

Marriage contracts also provide interesting evidence of gentry networks, not only in the marriage partners themselves, but also in the people chosen as trustees and feoffees. Wright suggests that both of these groups were chosen from a narrow circle of men who were closely related by blood or marriage, or from clerics, augmented by servants and old family friends. Trust was very important, backed up by professional expertise, and there was a tendency to avoid powerful men who might exploit their position. As many feoffees were in-laws "...the real importance of marriage must have been the securing of a reliable ally".<sup>85</sup> The feoffees named in the contract between the Duke of Buckingham and Henry Grene seem to have been weighted towards Grene interests as all of those that can be identified were local men. The list was headed by Sir William Catesby and included Henry Grene himself, Thomas Billing, Serjeant-at-Law,

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<sup>82</sup> NRO, SS 3383.

<sup>83</sup> NRO, SS 3309.

<sup>84</sup> NRO, SS 3385.

<sup>85</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, pp. 53-55.

and Thomas Wake, esquire, of Blisworth.

Sometimes jointures set up during marriage seem to have been kept almost secret because there were parties who might be opposed (notably the heir and the overlord), but the jointures contracted in the marriage settlement itself were usually very public as it was in the interests of both parties that the terms were widely known.<sup>86</sup> This was certainly the case in the Mordaunt contracts with as many as eighteen feoffees being appointed in the contract with John More.<sup>87</sup> Sometimes an important figure headed the list: Sir Thomas Audley, Lord Chancellor, in the case of John More and Sir Robert Brudenell, Chief Justice of Common Pleas, in the case of John Elmes.<sup>88</sup> Perhaps this reflected John Mordaunt's own position as a leading lawyer. Many of the other feoffees can be identified as relatives of the families concerned. Four of the feoffees in the contract between John Mordaunt and John More were immediate family of one or other of the two parties and two more were sons-in-law of John Mordaunt.<sup>89</sup>

Examining marriage as a source of evidence for family fortune and social status is tantalising as rarely have all the relevant documents survived, even for one family. Indications of status can be inferred by the marriage partners that are attracted, but sometimes this can be contradictory with family members unexpectedly marrying above or below their apparent position. Wealth or the outside interference of the Crown or guardians can explain some of these oddly matched couples, but not all. There are clues that politics and patronage were sometimes significant influences but there are not enough instances to form any firm conclusions.

Perhaps the most significant factor to emerge is the obvious one, that marriage was usually aimed at some sort of gain; be it political, monetary or

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>87</sup> NRO, SS 3384.

<sup>88</sup> NRO, SS 3378.

<sup>89</sup> NRO, SS 3384.

social status.<sup>90</sup> Money did open up opportunities and ancient lineage and local standing were important to those who lacked these attributes. It would also seem that some families were more inclined than others to enter the national marriage market, that all families were keen to be related to the local ruling elite, but that this network was not confined within county boundaries.

As it has already been shown that the majority of the ten families had, at some stage, had connections with the law, the marriage networks that these families formed would sit well with Ives proposition that common lawyers were more than a mere occupational group.<sup>91</sup> He suggests that with the cumulative weight of evidence on the number of lawyers linked by marriage, it is "...stretching doubt beyond reason to attribute the connections to the normal inter-communication of the landed gentry". He argues that these, apparently deliberate ties, did much to make landowners a more coherent entity and even affected the development of common law in England.<sup>92</sup>

### **Land and inheritance**

Apart from marriage contracts, there are several other sources of evidence for individual wealth and the social structures of a locality and beyond. By far the greatest volume of evidence lies in the extensive collections of property deeds which survive for some families. The sheer number of documents involved, however, makes them a very difficult resource to handle, and added to this is the complex nature of the legal transactions themselves which results in the evidence being difficult to interpret. On the other hand the paramount importance of land in the whole structure of society makes it important that this body of evidence is not ignored.

<sup>90</sup> Bonfield in "Affective Families" suggests that even the portions set up for daughters could be considered as an item of conspicuous consumption as the acquisition of a well placed husband could enhance the bride's family's social status in as lasting a way as would a new wing on the family seat. *Economic History Review* 39, p. 344.

<sup>91</sup> Ives, *Common Lawyers*, p. 383.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 388-389.

Each family seems to have had a small group of associates who were consistently involved in their business arrangements. It was not just in marriage contracts that it was important to have reliable friends and relatives. The most vulnerable contract was the Feoffment to Uses where a group of men were given actual possession of land as trustees (or feoffees) but for the use of the 'beneficial owner', who was often the person setting up the arrangement. The intention was to avoid entry fines when an heir inherited an estate as feoffees never died out because new ones were simply appointed. The danger was that in the eyes of the law the feoffees had outright ownership of the land, and in theory could simply ignore the beneficial owner.

Sir John Mordaunt I mostly put his faith in his brother, William, his relative, Wistan Brown, and his friend, William Gascoigne. His son, Lord Mordaunt, also trusted William Gascoigne, his son-in-law, Edmund Feteplace, and his son's father-in-law, Nicholas Harding.<sup>93</sup> The Catesbys seem to have been heavily involved in the affairs of both branches of the Grene family. Sir William Catesby headed the list of feoffees in the marriage settlement between Henry Grene and the Duke of Buckingham<sup>94</sup> and presumably in this capacity he was responsible for the manorial court at Islip in 1478/9<sup>95</sup> and at Lowick in 1475/6.<sup>96</sup> Sir William was also a witness in 1475/6, alongside Sir Ralph Hastings, in land dealings around Easton Neston and Hulcote which involved Richard Empson.<sup>97</sup> Sir William's son, William Catesby II, presumably replaced his father as a feoffee of the Grene lands as he held the manorial court at Lowick in 1482<sup>98</sup> and he was also a trustee for Sir Thomas Grene of Greens Norton in 1483, alongside Richard Empson and other local men.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>93</sup> NRO, SS 263, 264, 1170, 2080, 2432, 2515, 2578, 2770-2773, 3309.

<sup>94</sup> NRO, SS 4354.

<sup>95</sup> NRO, SS 3585.

<sup>96</sup> NRO, SS 3472.

<sup>97</sup> NRO, FH MTD/E/27/3.

<sup>98</sup> NRO, SS 3459.

<sup>99</sup> NRO, GI (45).

These same records also provide information about individual families themselves. How and when a family acquired land is a key feature of understanding their status and fortune. Christine Carpenter goes so far as to suggest that buying land was usually confined to rising families, that is before they could command lucrative marriages.<sup>100</sup> For one particular family this does not seem to be true: the Mordaunts certainly continued to be very active buyers of land well after they had reached the rank of baron and had already made some very profitable marriages. Perhaps the size of John Mordaunt II's family made it an economic necessity to build up as large an estate as possible.

The state of the land market itself is also worth investigating. Carpenter found in Warwickshire that more land became available by the end of the fifteenth century because people were more willing to sell. The reason for this is not entirely clear but seems to have been linked to a change in the economy.<sup>101</sup> There is certainly a great deal of evidence from Northamptonshire collections of land being bought and sold in the second half of the fifteenth century and well into the sixteenth. The majority of these purchases seem to be aimed at consolidating blocks of land in particular places, often by way of small parcels from a variety of people. S.M. Wright found a similar pattern in Derbyshire.<sup>102</sup> At first the Mordaunts bought up land around Turvey and Stagsden and later around their inherited Grene's land at Lowick, Addington and Sudbergh. Richard Empson looked particularly to Easton Neston, Hulcote and Burcote but also to Stoke Bruerne and Shutlanger while the Knightleys concentrated on Charwelton and Preston Capes.<sup>103</sup>

It is possible that some of this land was on the market because of a lack of male heirs as sometimes the sellers were women. For example in 1497 Eleanor

<sup>100</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 119.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>102</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 26.

<sup>103</sup> Above, pp. 53-54, 60-62, 68-69, 104-5.

Coly was selling land in Stagsden,<sup>104</sup> Joan Loken was doing the same in Turvey in 1510<sup>105</sup> as was Eleanor Richardson in 1512.<sup>106</sup> In relation to these sales, Wright suggests that personal contact was important with preference being given to friends and relatives.<sup>107</sup> There is certainly evidence of this in sales to the Mordaunts by Richard Feteplace, John Brown and George Brown.<sup>108</sup>

More positive evidence that the focus of many negotiations was consolidation lies, perhaps, in the exchange of land rather than the purchase of new land. For example in 1497 John Mordaunt I exchanged with Sir John Broughton whereby Mordaunt got land in Turvey and at Broughton in North Crawley, Buckinghamshire.<sup>109</sup> Richard Knightley and Richard Colles exchanged land in Snorscombe and Preston Capes<sup>110</sup> and Richard Empson gained land at Easton Neston held by the priory at Swardsley in exchange for land elsewhere in the county.<sup>111</sup> There is also evidence of steps being taken to avoid the break up of an estate such as when in 1505 Edith Carew (the mother of John Mordaunt II) gave back to her son land that had been bequeathed to her by her late husband, John Mordaunt II, in exchange for cash.<sup>112</sup>

Carpenter also stresses the value of these legal records on the broader front in extending our understanding of how political authority worked between the gentry and the nobility. She argues a case that in late medieval England a hierarchical view of power was the norm, in spite of evidence put forward by Susan Wright for Derbyshire and Simon Payling for Nottinghamshire that in these counties it was the gentry rather than the nobility who held the real local power. Carpenter suggests that a view of noble power based on the strength of

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<sup>104</sup> NRO, SS 2578-82.

<sup>105</sup> NRO, SS 810.

<sup>106</sup> NRO, SS 2576.

<sup>107</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 27.

<sup>108</sup> NRO, SS 2599, 4141, 3994.

<sup>109</sup> NRO, SS 1178-80.

<sup>110</sup> NRO, K 1 - Various documents. Also above, p. 105.

<sup>111</sup> NRO, FH MTD/E/28/2.

<sup>112</sup> NRO, SS 1309.



affinities misses the body of evidence contained in property deeds and legal records of "... bonds forged in daily association". Her detailed analysis of Warwickshire evidence leads her to conclude

... that noble lordship lay at the apex of local societies at this time and that its preponderance cannot be judged by simple counting of retainers<sup>113</sup>

Evidence of magnate influence in Northamptonshire records is not quite so clear cut, but these documents do reinforce other sources about which noble families were actually involved with Northamptonshire and its various gentry families, even if the extent of their authority is not established. There are several references to the Gray family which demonstrate their interest in both Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire over a long period of time. For example in 1498 John Mordaunt I received a messuage and land in Turvey from George Gray, Earl of Kent<sup>114</sup> and in 1506 Richard Empson entered into an agreement with Richard Gray, Earl of Kent, to rent Towcester hundred and manor for £50 a year. He also bought the patronage of Canons Ashby Priory for 700 marks.<sup>115</sup> Four years after Empson's execution his son Thomas paid 1,000 marks to the Earl of Kent to reclaim Towcester manor and also agreed to pay the Earl and Countess an annuity of £50 for life.<sup>116</sup> In 1535, Lord William Gray of Whilton quitclaimed land in Abthorp and Foscot to Edmund Knightley.<sup>117</sup>

The Stafford family also had an interest in the area as in 1492 Edward Stafford, Earl of Wiltshire, granted land in Turvey to John Mordaunt. This is possibly the same land that was quitclaimed in 1499 by the Duke of Buckingham after Edward's death.<sup>118</sup> The Duke clearly maintained some control, however, as

<sup>113</sup> Carpenter, 'Who Ruled the Midlands in the Later Middle Ages?', *Midland History*, XIX (1994), p. 9.

<sup>114</sup> NRO, SS 3189-92.

<sup>115</sup> Above, p. 70; NRO, FH MTD/D/27/4, D/18/8.

<sup>116</sup> Above, pp. 74-76; NRO, FH MTD/O/27/10, F/27/2, D/21/1.

<sup>117</sup> NRO, FH MTD/D/15/6.

<sup>118</sup> NRO, SS 3193-95.

in 1500 he granted the manor of Chalton to Margaret Stafford, widow of Edward, Earl of Wiltshire, and in 1502 he granted the view of frankpledge at Turvey to John Mordaunt I and his brother William. In 1497 the two brothers had been granted the stewardship of the Gloucester fee in Bedfordshire by yet another member of the nobility - Katrina, Duchess of Bedford.<sup>119</sup>

Woodville family connections in the county are brought out in one document which recites how Richard Woodville, Earl Ryvers, sold the manor of Hulcote to John Dyve who then sold the same to Richard Empson in 1493.<sup>120</sup> Wright's idea that friendship was important in property dealing is reinforced by this transaction as John Dyve says that he is selling to Richard Empson for 200 marks but also "... for divers and many grete dedes by hym considered don unto hym by the said Richard Emson".<sup>121</sup> As a percentage of the total legal records in the three big collections studied, however, the evidence of association with the nobility is very slight when compared with the gentry's dealings with each other.

Wills are a more manageable source of family evidence as, by their very nature, the context is defined, but their value is variable depending on the detail they contain.<sup>122</sup> At the very least they usually provide information on family relationships and social networks, as executors etc. were usually chosen from a restricted circle. Little about the extent of the family estate is usually revealed as land was not often conveyed by will but governed by the laws of inheritance. Exceptions were sometimes made for purchased land which, in the absence of other records, does give some indication of a family being active in building up an estate at a particular period of their history. Wills can be quite detailed on personal possessions which does reveal something about social and economic status. Wills are also particularly important in respect of attitudes to religion and can support or refute theories such as there being a changing religious climate

<sup>119</sup> Above, p. 41; NRO, SS 3201, 3196, 2372.

<sup>120</sup> NRO, FH MTD/E/20/2.

<sup>121</sup> Above, p. 69.

<sup>122</sup> For details of the locations of the wills mentioned see Appendix 5, p. 288.

with a move towards more secular bequests.

In relation to social structures there are no significant revelations in the wills of the families studied. As Wright found in Derbyshire, most of the families favoured their own kin as trustees and executors with some support from clergy and lawyers.<sup>123</sup> Henry Fermor and Sir Valentine Knightley appointed their respective eldest sons and heirs, joined in Valentine's case by his nephew, Thomas Spencer, and friends, Francis Saunders and Thomas Nicholls. Joan Knightley and Anthony Catesby chose their second sons. In Joan's case, her eldest son was already dead, but in Anthony's case, the heir, Thomas, was appointed as supervisor of the will. Emmotte Fermor shared the role of executor between her three surviving sons, one of whom was from her first marriage. Robert Whittlebury appears in the wills of three members of the Grene/Stafford family. Margaret Grene describes him as her son, Constance Stafford as her brother and Edward Stafford as his uncle, but almost certainly Robert was a half brother to Constance as the son of Margaret Grene by her first husband. Lord Parr of Horton had no sons and he chose his nephew and niece, William Parr, Earl of Essex, and his sister Catherine, Queen of England, as his overseers, while another nephew, Nicholas Throckmorton, was one of the executors. John Mordaunt I appointed his established business associates - William Mordaunt, his brother, and his friend, William Gascoigne, in preference to his son, John, whose only participation in the will was as a witness.

It was not unusual for women to be included in active roles. John Stafford appointed his wife, Constance, as chief executor alongside "...my lord cardenall" and others, as his son was under age. Constance herself appointed her mother, Margaret, to be assisted by John Catesby, Serjeant-at-Law, and others. Her son Edward is not mentioned at all. Thomas Fermor's sons were all under age and so he appointed his wife, Emmotte, while Sir Richard Knightley chose his wife,

<sup>123</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 57.

Joan, as sole executor with his son and heir, Richard, only taking over if Joan died.

The alternative choice to family was sometimes the clergy. For example John Tresham appointed as executor William Bassett, parson of his local church of St. Peters at Rushton, together with John Cheyne. Edward Stafford included William Field, the master of Fotheringhay, as one of his executors, while Henry Fermor made the vicar of Langford the supervisor of his will.

Men of higher rank than the testators were rarely brought into the picture. Wright suggests that the avoidance of more powerful men who might exploit their position was deliberate policy except in the case of a minority when their protection could be vital.<sup>124</sup> Perhaps this was in Thomas Fermor's mind when he appointed Sir Richard Harcourt as supervisor. The only members of the higher nobility to appear in any of these wills were the Earl of Shrewsbury, as supervisor to Edward Stafford, (but he was related to the Staffords and it has been suggested that Edward wanted the Talbot family to be beneficiaries of his estate<sup>125</sup>) and William Parr, Earl of Essex, who was overseer to his uncle. John Tresham specifically asked his supervisor, Sir Nicholas Vaux, to be a good master to his wife and children and Sir Nicholas could be considered as family as he was stepfather to John Parr, the husband of John's niece, Constance Vere, and to William Parr who was the father of Tresham's daughter-in-law. As an added incentive, Sir Nicholas's support was bought with a bequest of £6. 13s. 4d. The same sum was paid by Valentine Knightley to his three overseers even though one of them, Sir John Spencer, was his nephew. John Spencer had already been given a silver gilt standing cup worth 20 marks as executor to another uncle, Sir Richard Catesby.

Wright suggests that often both the drawing up and execution of a will was

<sup>124</sup>Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>125</sup>See Mordaunt biography above.

private family affair.<sup>126</sup> This was certainly true for Joan Knightley who appointed her son, Edmund, as sole executor, with Edward Ferrers,<sup>127</sup> her daughter Susan, her sons, John and Valentine, and two servants as witnesses. Servants can often be identified as witnessing wills; sometimes because they are described as such and sometimes because they are identified as such when being given bequests.<sup>128</sup>

As death approached consciences often pricked men and women, both in relation to God and to their fellow men. The going rate for 'tithes forgotten' was apparently 6s. 8d (eg. Sir Richard Knightley) but for Anthony Catesby it went up to 20 shillings and for Constance Stafford it was the huge sum of 66s. 8d. Perhaps these sums reflected the size of the estate concerned. William Catesby was anxious to right various wrongs such as restoring land wrongfully purchased, completing payment for land that he had legally acquired and settling all his debts. The settling of debts was also a prime concern of Edward Stafford, and Sir Richard Knightley clearly had a conscience about people he had wronged or taken goods from against their wishes.

Personal bequests can extend our knowledge of a family's social relationships as well as giving glimpses of their wealth and status. The centrality of sheep as the source of family wealth is very clear in the early wills of the Fermor family. Many of the bequests of Henry Fermor in 1465 and his daughter-in-law, Emmotte, in 1501, were in the form of ewes, lambs and wool. Some of the recipients are identified as family or servants, but others merely named. In both cases unknown numbers of godchildren received a ewe with lamb. The possessions mentioned in these two wills were beds, household utensils and brass pots which suggests that the family had not yet acquired the wealth that was theirs by the middle of the sixteenth century.

The Grene/Stafford wills, on the other hand, are full of references to silver

<sup>126</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 54.

<sup>127</sup> He was the father of one of her daughters-in-law.

<sup>128</sup> For example the wills of Sir Richard Catesby and Anthony Catesby.

and gilt pots and bowls, gold chains and rich clothing of silk, velvet, fur, and cloth of gold, which indicates an altogether grander lifestyle, but it is interesting to see that beds and bedding were still important enough to be mentioned. There are some indications that Edward Stafford, the last of the line, may have lived above his means. Some of his land was enfeoffed for his wife's lifetime, but with reversion to the Duke of Buckingham, and he constantly refers to selling off woods, robes and plate to settle debts, as well as requesting his wife not to take her full third of his goods. His only bequests of money as opposed to goods are to his servants. The number of people involved is not specified but all gentlemen and gentlewomen were to receive 40 shillings, yeomen 20 shillings and grooms 10 shillings in addition to being kept for thirty days after his death.

Similar monetary bequests had been made to servants by his father, but his mother, Constance, extended the period that the servants should be kept in meat drink and wages to a quarter of a year. Other families were less forthcoming with actual money but extended the period that servants were kept in employment. This was for a year in the case of Sir Richard Knightley, his son Valentine and Sir Richard Catesby. Anthony was particularly generous and specified that all servants not receiving an annuity should get three years wages and some servants were left houses for their lifetime.

Women's wills are often much more specific in bequests than those of men. Joan Knightley left a gilded cup and two rings to her daughter, Susan, and three gilded goblets, two gilded pitchers and two silver pitchers to her son, Edmund, as well as beds and hangings and other household items which are all described. Sir Richard Catesby, on the other hand, merely said that his plate was to be divided equally amongst his wife and sons. It is interesting that Joan Knightley did not treat her children equally - the bulk went to her eldest daughter and her eldest living son. Another son, Valentine, only received £100 and his wife a green walnut coffer with 20 nobles put in it, while John had to be satisfied

with the £10 his father left him plus £40 from his mother.

Any suggestion that by the sixteenth century there was less interest in the church and a growing dissatisfaction with the religious houses is certainly not supported by the evidence of these families.<sup>129</sup> The dedication on behalf of men's souls changed little over the years except that some testators opted for the shortened version of God and the whole company of heaven while others specified particular saints: usually Saint Mary, Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist. The latter was the choice of Sir Richard Knightley III in 1534 (written in 1528) - a family whose descendants were soon to become noted puritans.<sup>130</sup> Most testators also left money for masses to be said and sung for the sake of their souls. In Richard Knightley's case this was to be "... as hastily as they can". As for the religious houses, they are even more likely to be remembered in the sixteenth rather than the fifteenth-century wills, perhaps because they offered a cheaper alternative to expensive chantries.

In 1465 Henry Fermor left 8 marks a year for a chaplain at Langford to pray for his soul and for the health of his wife and children for seven years. In 1467 Henry Grene left 10 marks a year for two priests and in 1473 John Stafford, Earl of Wiltshire, left 12 marks for a priest at the college of Pleshey to perpetually sing for his soul. By 1501 Emmotte Fermor was less ambitious and only left 10s to each of the four orders of friars in Oxford. In 1520 John Tresham specified that the Abbot of Pipewell Abbey should sing a requiem mass at his burying, for which the Abbot was to get 10 shillings, with 12 pence going to every monk and 4 pence to every novice. In 1553 Sir Richard Catesby left all of his servants a

<sup>129</sup> Christopher Harper-Bill presents an overview of this whole debate and challenges the view that religious bequests declined from around 1480. He points to evidence of "enthusiastic piety" from wills, churchwardens accounts and surviving buildings - certainly as late as the 1520s.

C. Harper-Bill, *The Pre-Reformation Church in England 1400-1530* (London, 1989), pp. 71-73.

<sup>130</sup> Christopher Haigh attempts to link introductory preambles of surviving wills to strength of Catholic faith, but concludes that it would be unwise to attach too much significance to this evidence.

C. Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 199-201.

"black cote to pray for me". The practice of leaving 12 pence to the mother church of Lincoln only appears in the fifteenth-century wills of the families studied, but this is deceptive as this was common practice in many other Northamptonshire wills.<sup>131</sup>

The situation regarding major works on church building and the erection of memorial monuments will be discussed later, but there is certainly no evidence of decline of interest in these activities, as demonstrated by the Spencer monuments at Great Brington.<sup>132</sup> Smaller bequests to local churches were also very common. In the fifteenth century the Grene/Stafford family were particularly prone to leave their own rich garments, while Henry Fermor's bequests again reflected his livelihood - a ewe to each of the seven principal lights and a cow to the chapel. Wax for candles was popular eg. Thomas Fermor left 4lb of wax to every light; he also left £20 to build an aisle and 6 marks to buy an antiphonal book. Actual cash steadily becomes the more usual bequest. Sometimes this was for specific purposes, such as the repairing of the bells 13s. 4d. and to buy a canopy £4 (Emotte Fermor); lead for the steeple (John Tresham); or for church seats (Anthony Catesby), but often it was just for general repairs with amounts varying from 6s. 8d., by John Tresham, to 20 shillings from Sir John Mordaunt and Sir Richard Knightley. In all these cases the bequests were to more than one church which gives an indication of the landed interests of the families concerned.

Even though religious bequests did not decline significantly, there is some evidence of a steady increase in charity giving. In 1501 Emmotte Fermor left 12 pence to every poor and woman in the new and old almshouses in Abingdon and in 1520 John Tresham left 6s. 8d. to poor folk. By 1552/3 Sir Richard Catesby and Anthony Catesby each left 20 shillings to the poor men's chest, but in 1566 Sir Valentine Knightley left the huge sum of £100 for his poor neighbours

<sup>131</sup> See Northamptonshire Early Wills at NRO.

<sup>132</sup> Above, p. 159; below, pp. 239-40.



in towns near Fawsley. Anthony Catesby also left three newly built cottages to three honest, poor householders, to be rent free in exchange for labour, with the inhabitants also getting free milk and two loads of wood a year. Emmotte Fermor is the only one to broaden her giving to the general community with £4 to repair the new bridge.<sup>133</sup>

From the evidence of the wills considered, piety was as widespread and deeply rooted in the sixteenth century as in the fifteenth, and if we accept Burgess's proposition that wills actually seriously underestimate the extent of religious giving, because widows were often given discretion to make additional arrangements, then the church in Northamptonshire was alive and well.<sup>134</sup> While there were considerable variations in the amount of money devoted to religious purposes, these were usually associated with the financial position of the family concerned. At the level of smaller bequests there was remarkable unanimity.

### **Timing of changes in fortune**

If there were such similarities in attitude and so little evidence of change in a religious context, what of changes in family fortunes and their relationship to wider events? When we map out the fluctuations in fortune for the ten families from the mid-fifteenth to mid-sixteenth centuries there is much less cohesion and it is immediately apparent how cautious one must be in drawing conclusions from a small sample. The pattern for the five main families shows very little impact by political events, but this picture is substantially altered when the further five families are added.<sup>135</sup> Overall there are clearly some general trends but also some significant differences.

Of the ten families three exceptions stand out. The Grenes had already

<sup>133</sup> Above, p. 82, note 12.

<sup>134</sup> C. Burgess, "By quick and dead": Wills and Pious Bequests in Later Medieval Bristol', *English Historical Review*, 102 (1987), p. 842.

<sup>135</sup> See Appendix 6, pp. 289-90. This visual representation takes into consideration a rough measure of both wealth and status as judged by knighthood, elevations to the peerage, and other significant positions.

begun to decline by 1400 from the height of their success in the fourteenth century when they had accumulated their wealth and reached positions of social status, such as Lord Chief Justice. The Grenes of Greens Norton maintained knighthood to the end of their line in 1506, but the Grenes of Drayton became esquires and there is some evidence of financial problems in the early fifteenth century, during the lifetime of Ralph, which were reversed by his son Henry (died 1467). When Henry died the family continued at Drayton in the person of his daughter and heir, Constance, who had transformed her social status by marrying John Stafford, the second son of the Duke of Buckingham. Even higher status followed when John was created Earl of Wiltshire in 1469.

The Spencer family demonstrate the opposite extreme to the Grenes. They made little obvious progress in wealth or status until towards the end of the fifteenth century, but continued strongly from then on. The Empsons, on the other hand, began, like the remaining families, with modest beginnings in the early part of the fifteenth century, but their rise and decline only occupied a span of approximately fifty five years from the mid 1470s to the early 1530s. Their rise began and ended with one man, Richard Empson, who was knighted by Henry VII but attainted and executed by Henry VIII at the start of his reign. For the last twenty years of Empson survival, through Richard's son Thomas, they were already in sharp decline because of financial difficulties.<sup>136</sup>

The other seven families all began the fifteenth century in the lower to middle ranks of the gentry, made unspectacular but steady progress for the first half of the century and were all still in quite strong positions at the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign. For the Knightleys, Mordaunts, Fermors and Parrs, this progress remained relatively steady with the Parrs recovering quickly from attainder in 1459 to eventually reach the peerage in 1539. The Fermors also regained ground after attainder in 1539 and at least married into the peerage,

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<sup>136</sup> Above, pp. 76-77.

even though they did not achieve that status themselves. The Mordaunts also reached the peerage in 1532, but the Knightleys had to wait until 1798 before one of them was created a baronet.

A similar pattern might seem to be true of the Catesby, Tresham and Vaux families if one only looks at their position in 1450 and again in 1550 when all three had achieved higher status and increased their wealth. This, however, would be to ignore some traumatic changes in the second half of the fifteenth century. The Catesby family reached a peak under Richard III, lost everything with William Catesby's attainder and execution in 1485 and, although his descendants went on to be knighted, they never completely recovered in financial terms.

The Vauxes, on the other hand, lost everything in 1460, were not restored until 1485, but then continued to increase their wealth and climb the social ladder as far as baron in 1523. The Treshams had an even more chequered pattern. In 1461 Thomas I went from being knighted to being attainted within a few months as the monarchy changed hands.<sup>137</sup> Over the next seven years he was partially restored to wealth and position, only to be imprisoned for two years from 1468 to 1470 and finally attainted and executed in 1471. Restoration came in 1485, but the family made little further progress apart from the fact that Sir Thomas II managed to consolidate his estate and was briefly elevated to the House of Lords as the Grand Prior of the order of St John.

It is apparent from the aforementioned dates, that in the problems or furthering of fortune experienced by this last group of families, the political strife that manifested itself as the Wars of the Roses apparently played a significant part. This is particularly obvious in the case of the Vaux family who remained firmly Lancastrian throughout. After the death of his father in 1460, William Vaux III did not wait to see how he would fare under Edward IV, but probably fled

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<sup>137</sup> Above, pp. 133-34.

abroad with Margaret of Anjou. It is not known why he took this particular course of action as it was more usual for landowners to try to reach an accommodation with a new king in order to protect their estate for heirs and dependants. He returned in 1471 only to be killed at Tewksbury, but by this time he had a son and daughter and, perhaps surprisingly, no attempt was made to tamper with the Lancastrian loyalty of these children. As their mother remained in the personal service of Margaret of Anjou, they were brought up in the household of Margaret Beaufort, and Edward IV was generous enough to restore two of the Vaux manors for their maintenance. This is an interesting insight into social convention where even the enemy was recognised as having rights and a position to maintain. Given this attitude, it seems likely that Nicholas Vaux would have eventually inherited at least part of the family estate even without the Lancastrian restoration at Bosworth.

The fate of the Tresham family confirms this view. Although Sir Thomas Tresham was knighted for his service to the Lancastrian cause at the second Battle of St Albans and fought again at Towton where he was taken prisoner, the penalty was not as severe as it might have been. He was pardoned by Edward IV in 1464, and in 1467 his attainder was reversed and he was partially restored to his estate. The regard which the family continued to command in Northamptonshire, as evidenced by his election as a Knight of the Shire in 1467, and Edward's need to win over former Lancastrian supporters were presumably behind this favourable treatment. During these years Thomas Tresham was clearly more willing than William Vaux to accept the Yorkist regime. The turning point came with his imprisonment in 1468.<sup>138</sup> Whether he had done anything to arouse suspicion or whether it was just precautionary treatment of known Lancastrian sympathisers is unknown. He was released and reinstated by the Readeption government but this was to be a short lived affair and the Tresham

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<sup>138</sup> Above, pp. 133-35.

family's lowest point came with the execution of Thomas in the aftermath of Tewksbury. As with the Vaux family, the success of the Lancastrian Henry VII at Bosworth restored the Treshams to their full inheritance and the beginning of further favour, but also like the Vauxes there is a good chance that this would have happened anyway even under the Yorkists. The marriage of the Tresham heir into a known Yorkist family gives a clear indication that this was the expectation.<sup>139</sup> The acceptability as a marriage partner of the son of a 'traitor' who had been stripped of his lands, to a knightly family can only be explained by the attraction of the Tresham lineage or the prospect of future inheritance.

The experiences of these two families who supported the wrong side at the wrong time, however, cannot lead to an assumption that problems would inevitably have arisen from this course of action: as evidence from other families proves. The Parrs had been very active on the Yorkist side from before Edward's first reign but they sailed smoothly through the Lancastrian restoration. The death of Sir William Parr around 1483 was probably very opportune for Parr survival. It avoided any direct involvement with Richard III which, given their track record, was almost a certainty, and allowed for the marriage of his widow to Nicholas Vaux. This brought the Parr heirs into a Lancastrian household and to a share of Vaux favour.

The fate of the Catesby family is also more complex in relation to politics than at first appears. What is usually stressed is their sharp decline when William was executed after Bosworth as an active supporter of Richard III. This ignores their earlier smooth transition from Lancaster to York. Sir William Catesby I was a trusted Lancastrian supporter in the troubled times of the late 1450s; so much so that he had custody of Northampton Castle and was a Justice of the Peace in both Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. At first Edward IV clearly saw William as being in the Lancastrian camp as he removed him from the Bench until 1465,

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<sup>139</sup> Above, p. 135.

and the Readeption government still saw him as one of theirs when they appointed him as Sheriff for Northamptonshire.<sup>140</sup> Up to this point William had cleverly managed to negotiate the troubled waters and keep his options open. After 1471, however, his transfer of loyalty to Lord Hastings seems to have been complete, but even then his son kept a foot in the other camp with an advantageous marriage to the daughter of the Lancastrian Lord Zouche.<sup>141</sup> Eventually William Catesby II gambled everything on Richard III, but even then, if it had not been for the hatred that he aroused through his betrayal of Hastings, he would probably have had sufficient influence behind him to survive a Lancastrian restoration, as others did. Their lack of military involvement certainly enabled his Whiston cousins to emerge unscathed and his own heirs were fairly soon restored to the Catesby estate, though not without financial implications.

With only three out of ten families really being affected by the Wars of the Roses, one cannot say that civil war was a major problem to family survival. Though an individual might suffer from actual death in battle, attainder or execution, the long term effects on the family were not necessarily significant. Even the Treshams and Vauxes would probably have recovered without the victory of Henry VII - that merely hastened the event.

On the other hand, any change in the person of the monarch, even within the same dynastic line, seems to have been a potential threat or boost to family fortune. The most obvious example of the former is the attainder and execution of Sir Richard Empson on the accession of Henry VIII. Empson had been a loyal and trusted servant of Henry VII and, with the continuation of the Tudor dynasty, one might have expected that his experience would have been invaluable to the young King. In the event he was used by Henry as a scapegoat to placate an aristocracy made discontented by the fiscal policies of his father. The unfortunate Empson had already suffered a small check in his upward mobility during the

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<sup>140</sup> Above, p. 121.

<sup>141</sup> The Zouche family eventually changed sides and fought for Richard III at Bosworth.

Yorkist period. When Richard III took the throne he was removed from the lucrative office of Attorney General for the Duchy of Lancaster.<sup>142</sup> For him the change from York to Lancaster/Tudor actually worked in his favour.

The crisis of succession with the death of Edward VI brought new dangers and possibilities, with families that supported Queen Mary from the outset gaining the most. John Spencer and John Fermor were knighted at the time of her coronation and the marriage of Fermor's sister, who had been an attendant of Mary as a princess, to John, Lord Mordaunt, might have owed something to royal favour. Sir Thomas Tresham was created Grand Prior of the newly restored order of St John, probably as a reward for being one of the first to support Mary, and even retained the title under Elizabeth I for the same reason. Elizabeth rightly recognised that if Lady Jane Grey had become established on the throne she herself would never have become Queen. On the other hand, Sir William Parr IV actually fought for the cause of Lady Jane Grey and for this he was attainted and deprived of the Order of the Garter. He might have suffered more severe penalties if it had not been for his relationship with the dowager Queen Catherine, but that, and the short duration of Mary's reign, enabled him to survive fairly well until Elizabeth I restored him fully to estate and rank.

There is only one other significant fluctuation in fortune that can be ascribed to political events and that is the attainder of Richard Fermor in 1539.<sup>143</sup> The apparent cause was religious as he was charged with shielding his Catholic chaplain, but the indications are that Fermor was too outspoken in objecting to the increasing rights and royal prerogatives that Henry VIII was taking to himself in the aftermath of the Reformation. The consequences were not too serious in the long term. Richard was only imprisoned for a short time and over the next few years most of his possessions were gradually restored. A process that was accelerated by the accession of Edward VI.

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<sup>142</sup> Above, pp. 67-68.

<sup>143</sup> Above, pp. 89-91.

Perhaps the most obvious pattern that can be observed in family fortunes with this sample is that of continuity rather than change. Apart from the Spencers, whose history before the latter half of the fifteenth century is obscure, all of the families had been making progress in wealth and status over a very long period of time. It is often suggested that the Tudors brought in their own men and that the sixteenth century was noted for the rise of the gentry. This evidence both confirms and denies these propositions. The gentry families described in this study had been rising (sometimes with temporary setbacks) long before the Tudors came in sight of the throne. On the other hand, for three of the families this upward mobility became more marked under Henry VIII and was consolidated by elevation to the peerage. To this extent they could be described as 'new men'. The elevation from gentry status, however, was not a new phenomenon - Richard Woodville had been created a baron in 1449.<sup>144</sup>

Another noticeable feature in the pattern of fortune is that several families enjoyed a period of more intensive growth corresponding to the lifetime of one or two men, and often coincident with the reign of a single monarch. This is most obvious with the Empson family where the entire rise of the family is attributable to Sir Richard Empson, particularly during the reign of Henry VII. Before this the Catesby family had risen sharply, through William Catesby II, in the short reign of Richard III, while the brothers Richard and William Fermor began to make progress under Henry VII, but this continued and became more marked under Henry VIII. Sir Nicholas was the chief architect of Vaux family success, which continued throughout the reign of Henry VII and into the first part Henry VIII. The Parr family pattern was a little different as, although William Parr IV and his uncle William III made very obvious progress under Henry VIII, they were building on a solid tradition.

Other families also achieved success over a longer period of time, but

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<sup>144</sup> Below p. 207.



even then individuals can usually be picked out. The Mordaunt curve of upward mobility rose steeply under Sir John I and his son, while in the case of the Treshams, Sir William I laid a good base in the first half of the fifteenth century, but it was left to his great grandson, Thomas, to consolidate this over a century later. Sir Richard Knightly II steadily built up family prosperity through the reigns of four successive kings, but it was his unscrupulous son, Edmund, who probably did the most to advance the estate under Henry VIII. With the Spencers it was the ability of Sir John II that laid the firm foundation on which his successors were able to build.

Only two families did not arrive at 1560 in a stronger position than they had been in 1460. In the case of the Grenes this was simply because they succumbed to natural causes - the failure to produce male heirs. With their established wealth and status there is every reason to presume that they would have continued to flourish. The female heirs on both sides of the family did, in fact, marry into families that were either already members of the nobility<sup>145</sup> or at least later reached the peerage.<sup>146</sup> On the other hand, the death of Sir Richard Empson was anything but natural and although his son was partially restored to his estate, he not only lacked his father's ability which put the family into decline, he also sealed their fate by failing to produce a male heir.

These families clearly exemplify Payling's three categories of leading gentry.<sup>147</sup> In the first category are those who represent the county's ancient 'aristocracy' such as the Catesbys, Grenes, Knightleys, Treshams and Vauxes. The second consists of families who were similarly long established but only recently risen, often characterised by a great leap forward in status which was frequently due to the successful career of one man in the law or through direct royal service. As we have just seen, Richard Empson fits this profile exactly. The

<sup>145</sup> The powerful Stafford family

<sup>146</sup> They married into both the Vaux and Parr families.

<sup>147</sup> Payling, *Political Society*, p. 19.

third category takes in imports into the county - usually through marriage to wealthy heiresses. The Mordaunts are the clearest example of this, but the Parrs could also be put into this category. The Fermors and the Spencers form a rather different category. Both were imports who had acquired wealth over a relatively short period, albeit by different routes, and who had bought estates in the county *before* they married into the leading families. The marriages, however, set the seal on their entry into the upper ranks of the county gentry, and their acceptability for official positions.

## **POWER STRUCTURES AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

So far this analysis has concentrated on the families themselves: at patterns in family fortunes, social relationships and their general behaviour. This last chapter will look at these families in a political context; individually and collectively and both inside the county and on the national scene. Before we can ascribe any significance to the actions or positions held by the small number of families in this study, however, it is necessary to put them into perspective: to take a broader look at the county as a whole and consider who were the leaders of the shire. Moving on from there we will examine the nature of political structures both within the locality and between the locality and central power and finally consideration will be given as to how far they can be considered as a county community.

### **An overview of county leadership**

In the later medieval period, Northamptonshire, like neighbouring Leicestershire, had none of the upper ranks of titled nobility in residence within its borders. Nor did either county come under the obvious control of any great monastery, although the abbeys of Leicester and Peterborough did have extensive land holdings in the respective counties. Again like Leicestershire, a major absentee landowner had always been the king as head of the Duchy of Lancaster and throughout the early Middle Ages another powerful force in the

Midlands was the affinity of the earldom of Huntingdon, but this became rather fragmented. Towards the end of the fourteenth century part of this earldom was inherited by Reginald Grey of Ruthin who was also allowed to style himself Lord Hastings in the right of his grandmother, a daughter of John, first Lord Hastings. The Grey family were significant in the region as indicated by their membership on commissions for Northamptonshire and elsewhere. Reginald had married Margaret, the daughter of Lord Roos and was succeeded by his grandson, Edmund, who was created Earl of Kent in 1484. The Stafford family also held land in Northamptonshire and the neighbouring counties of Bedford, Buckingham, Huntingdon, Oxford and Warwick.<sup>1</sup> There is evidence that various local families were retained at some time by one or more of these noble households<sup>2</sup> but it is difficult to identify their actual influence in the locality. This is in keeping with Payling's findings for Nottinghamshire. He suggests that the work done so far on baronial affinities tends to exaggerate their impact because of an emphasis on particularly powerful men. In the fifteenth century it was the Crown that could give the greatest rewards and "... hence it was the king's affinity that attracted the wealthiest and most ambitious gentry".<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the situation at the aristocratic level, there must have been a social and political hierarchy among the minor nobility and the knights, esquires and gentlemen who made up the local gentry.<sup>4</sup> One way that we can investigate who these people were, and what standing they had in relation to each other, is to look at which families held official positions such as Sheriff or Justice of the

<sup>1</sup> In Northamptonshire they had acquired the manors of Naseby and Whiston and the town and hundred of Rothwell in 1343 as part of the Clare inheritance and in 1438 Duke Humphrey was granted Weedon Bec for life by the King. See Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> For example William Tresham (died 1452) was retained as an Apprentice-at-Law by Humphrey, Duke of Buckingham, and William Catesby (died 1485) was a councillor of Henry, Duke of Buckingham. See Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, Appendix C. Tresham, Catesby and Sir Richard Empson were all at one time stewards of Rothwell and John Mordaunt (died 1504?) was steward for Stafford land in Buckinghamshire from at least 1497 to 1503. *Ibid.*, appendix B.

<sup>3</sup> Payling, *Political Society*, p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> For Northamptonshire it is difficult to take the obvious course and look at status via wealth as little evidence is available and even tax and subsidy returns have had a poor survival rate.

Peace; which ones were elected to Parliament as Knights of the Shire; and which ones were appointed to the numerous commissions set up over this period. To see a pattern emerging it is sometimes necessary to trace the standing of a family back earlier into the fifteenth century and also to take account of established families of a later date.

From these various sources a fairly comprehensive list can be developed of Northamptonshire families holding one or more of these positions.<sup>5</sup> Between 1460 and 1560, approximately one hundred men can be identified, representing just over fifty different families. This total is very much in line with research into other counties where G. C Astill in late fourteenth-century Leicestershire, Susan Wright in fifteenth-century Derbyshire, and Christine Carpenter in fifteenth-century Warwickshire, have pointed to "... county gentry figures of between fifty and seventy."<sup>6</sup> More recently, Eric Acheson has identified about seventy gentry families in fifteenth-century Leicestershire which suggests an element of continuity in total numbers in at least this one county.<sup>7</sup>

Having established this list, a number of questions need to be addressed regarding social standing, hierarchy and political allegiance. Sixteen families make only one appearance on the list (i.e. one person holding one position) and these families will be largely ignored. It must also be remembered that there may have been families who sought no office or official recognition but were nevertheless wealthy and influential in their own locality and their existence might emerge through an examination of alternative evidence such as marriage alliances and property dealing.

The office of Sheriff is an obvious role to examine first as this appointment carried with it implications of both royal favour and local importance. The Sheriff was the king's chief official in the county, trusted with the task of dealing with any

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 7, p. 291-92.

<sup>6</sup> C. Given-Wilson, 'The King and the Gentry in Fourteenth-Century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, vol. 37 (1987), p. 100.

<sup>7</sup> E. Acheson, *A Gentry Community: Leicestershire c1423-1485*, (Cambridge, 1992).

unrest. On the other hand he had to be sure of local support as he had no standing army to rely on. In Leicestershire, Acheson found this role to be at the top of the gentry hierarchy, usually held by men who had already been knighted.<sup>8</sup> Robertson suggests that from the reign of Henry IV the tendency towards men close to the king being chosen as Sheriff gained momentum, increased again under Henry VI and finally became consistent policy under Edward IV.<sup>9</sup>

During the second half of the fourteenth century, the number of times that they held this office for Northamptonshire suggests that the Woodvilles of Grafton Regis had long been a force to be reckoned with.<sup>10</sup> For seven years from 1361, Richard Woodville had been Sheriff of Northamptonshire and he had a further term of office in 1370. A change in the law in 1340 had supposedly brought to an end the practice of extended re-election and from then on the Sheriff was to change every year. Exceptional circumstances could sometimes be claimed, however, and the Woodvilles had a shorter run from 1420 to 1422 with Thomas, who went on to two further terms in 1428 and 1433, and was followed in 1437 by another Richard Woodville. From then on the family disappeared from the list of sheriffs but not from the local scene as will be seen later.

The Wakes of Blisworth had an even earlier fourteenth century run from 1336 to 1340 and from then on made sporadic appearances<sup>11</sup> until 1484 when they disappeared completely until the eighteenth century. (We know that the Wakes suffered a major decline in the later fifteenth century especially with Thomas Wake who was imprisoned in the Tower for unspecified offences. He seems to have been released through bribing Richard Empson but was apparently thriftless and was forced to sell off property at Collingtree, in 1515,

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>9</sup> C.A. Robertson, 'Local Government and the King's "Affinity" in Fifteenth Century Leicestershire and Warwickshire', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society*, 52 (1976-77) pp. 39-42

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 9 for a list of Northamptonshire's Sheriffs, p. 294-95.

<sup>11</sup> They held office six times in the fifteenth century.

and eight years later Blisworth itself which he sold to Sir Richard Knightley).<sup>12</sup>

Other families that appeared regularly over a long period a time include the Grenes of Boughton, Drayton and Greens Norton and the Catesbys of Ashby St Ledger. A Thomas Grene made ten appearances between 1404 and 1465 and the Catesbys figured eleven times between 1442 and 1562. Interestingly the Catesbys held office in the reign of every monarch from Henry VI to Elizabeth except for Richard III (when William had more important positions). It is, perhaps, indicative of the Crown's need to control the country, coupled with local acceptance of changes in regime, that enabled succeeding kings to trust the same men as had their predecessors, even in times of civil unrest.

Although having fewer occasions in office, the Mauntells of Nether Heyford and the Griffins of Dingley and Braybrooke also spanned the Lancaster, Yorkist and Tudor reigns. William Vaux of Harrowden had three terms of office, in 1436-37, 1449-50 and 1453-54, but the family became closely associated with the Lancastrian cause and his son was attainted in 1461 and probably fled the country. Vaux family influence in the county did not resume until after 1485. Ralph Hastings of Harrowden<sup>13</sup> and Henry Huddleston were the only Sheriffs with clear Yorkist connections as their only appearances were under Edward IV (twice each). Robert Whittlebury of Marholm spanned Edward IV, Richard III and Henry VII, and the Newenhams, who held office twice under Edward, were brought back by Henry VIII. The Knightleys of Fawsley made an appearance in 1475 and held office fairly regularly from then onwards, while the Lovets appeared in 1481, 1490, 1515 and 1560. Reappearing in 1506, after about one hundred years, were the Treshams of Sywell and Rushton, and in 1508 the Mulshos of Finedon. The Treshams then continued through all the Tudor reigns, but the Parrs of Horton, as newcomers to Northamptonshire, made five fairly rapid appearances from 1509, all under Henry VIII. In 1511 the Spencers of Althorp were also

<sup>12</sup> P. Gordon, *The Wakes of Northamptonshire*, (Northampton, 1992), p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Ralph was the brother of William, Lord Hastings.

appointed by Henry VIII, while the Fermors of Easton Neston made a late appearance under Mary in 1557.<sup>14</sup> The Dyves of Harleston, from 1495, and the Andrews of Charwelton, from 1501, also seem to have been families who rose under the Tudors

It would seem from studying the office of Sheriff that Northamptonshire had no obvious social leaders and that few families had well defined Lancastrian, Yorkist or Tudor affinities. When we look further, however, at members of local commissions, at Justices of the Peace and at Members of Parliament, a slightly different pattern emerges. Long after their disappearance from the ranks of sheriff, the Woodvilles were obviously still a family of influence, not only in the county, but on the broader scene of the South Midlands. In 1449 Richard Woodville, Lord Ryvers, was summoned to his first Parliament as a baron and in 1450 he was listed after Thomas Lord Roos, Edmund Grey of Ruthin, Leo de Willis, and William Zouche of Harringworth as Commissioners for Tax in Northamptonshire.<sup>15</sup> In 1453 Lord Ryvers led a trio of himself, Sir William Catesby and Thomas Tresham Esq. (son of Sir William Tresham) in controlling the distribution of allowances against tax for Northamptonshire, while Ryvers also fulfilled the same function for Buckinghamshire.<sup>16</sup> In 1468 he once again had the same role for Northamptonshire, still accompanied by Thomas Tresham (who by then had been knighted) and joined by Richard Middleton (who had married Maude Grene). Ryvers was also a commissioner for Buckinghamshire and Kent. As this list of tax assessors includes Richard, Earl of Warwick for the three ridings of Yorkshire, William, Lord Hastings for Rutland, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire and Edmund, Earl of Kent, for Bedfordshire, the importance of

<sup>14</sup> They had been nominated much earlier but not picked - perhaps because of their Catholicism.

<sup>15</sup> *CFR* 1445-1452, pp. 171-72.

<sup>16</sup> *CFR* 1452-1461, p. 44.



the position is evident.<sup>17</sup> This smooth transition of the Woodvilles from Lancastrian support to Yorkist favour was undoubtedly the result of the marriage of Edward IV to Elizabeth Woodville, but the relationship of Edward and the Woodvilles was of mutual benefit as he needed to broaden his base of support and not rely so heavily on the Neville family.

The Zouche family were also long established in Northamptonshire. They were members of the House of Lords even before the Woodvilles, but without the backup of a large family, their power and influence seems to have been fairly restricted and localised. Their position of minor nobility, however, probably accounts for their relatively few appearances on lists of sheriffs or as members of the House of Commons. William Zouche was a Knight of the Shire in the Parliament of 1455/6, just before he inherited the title on his father's death in 1462. He was not summoned to Parliament as a baron until 1467 - perhaps because of his known Lancastrian sympathies. His son [?] William was Sheriff in 1497.

The Knightleys were clearly accepted as members of Northamptonshire gentry some years before achieving the office of sheriff with Richard Knightley being elected as a Knight of the Shire in 1420, 1423-24 and 1439-40. A similar pattern can be seen for the Dyves with John being a Member of Parliament in 1455/6 and 1560/1 and again in 1567/8, but this time for Dorchester. The Tresham family was also obviously important before being pricked as Sheriff with their sphere of influence again concentrating on Parliament. From 1423 to 1450 Sir William Tresham had been a Knight of the Shire for Northamptonshire for every Parliament called and was four times Speaker of the House. In 1446-47 his son, Thomas, was a Member for Buckinghamshire and in 1448-49 for

<sup>17</sup> *CFR 1461-1471*, p. 99. This financial experience of Richard Woodville might suggest that he was actually a strong candidate for the post of Treasurer of England, granted to him by Edward IV, and that the appointment was not just the favour to the Queen's father as assumed by many historians. The young King needed as much help as he could get to achieve financial solvency in the early years of his reign.

Huntingdonshire. In 1448 Thomas was Escheator for Northamptonshire and Rutland and the following year he was a distributor of tax allowances for Huntingdonshire. In the same year William Tresham fulfilled both of these functions for Northamptonshire while two years later, in 1451 and again in 1457, Thomas was Sheriff of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.<sup>18</sup> The Dyves and Treshams thus provide clues to looking at the standing of the nobility and gentry - one must look further afield than the boundaries of a single county. Established gentry, as well as the nobility, clearly had influence in neighbouring counties.

The Vauxes influence also spread over county boundaries. In between his terms as Sheriff for Northamptonshire Sir William Vaux was also Knight of the Shire, in 1442, but ten years later he was Sheriff of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire and five years after that he was Escheator for Northamptonshire and Rutland.<sup>19</sup> The gap in family appearance in public life, from 1457 until William's grandson Nicholas was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1485, is clearly indicative of their strong Lancastrian support. Sir William himself may have been killed at the Battle of Northampton while his son, William, probably fled the country only to be killed on his return at the Battle of Tewksbury.<sup>20</sup>

When membership of commissions is added to parliamentary representation, the Grenees and the Catesbys confirm their position among the leaders of the community. In 1447 Henry Grene esq. was a Knight of the Shire and in 1450 he and his cousin, Sir Thomas Grene, joined Thomas, Lord Roos, and Richard Woodville on the tax commission. In 1462 Thomas's son, Thomas Grene IV, was Escheator for Northamptonshire and Rutland. Henry Grene had already been a Justice of the Peace for Wiltshire for several years and in 1441 he was also appointed to the Bench in Northamptonshire, a position he held until his death apart from a gap in 1461/62. This loss of favour was short lived as in

<sup>18</sup> *CFR 1445-52*, p. 251. Above, p. 132.

<sup>19</sup> *CFR 1452-1461*, pp. 187, 196.

<sup>20</sup> Above, p. 141.

1463 he headed the list of Walter Mauntell, Roger Salisbury, Thomas Hartwell, Robert Tanfield, Henry Huddleston, Robert Isham and Walter Griffith as Assessors of Tax for the county. This time no 'big names' appeared on the list.<sup>21</sup>

Sir William Catesby represented Northamptonshire in the Parliament of 1449, changed to Warwickshire 1449-50, but returned to Northamptonshire in 1453-54. As well as being three times Sheriff of Northamptonshire, in 1451-52, 1455-56 and 1470-71, he also held that office for Herefordshire. His brother John was regularly called to Parliament as one of the Serjeants-at-Law from 1469 to 1486 and his son, William, probably represented Northamptonshire in the Parliament of 1483, as he certainly did in 1484 when he was elected Speaker.

Sir Thomas Billing of Wappenham was a new name in the 1450s. Although never Sheriff of the county, he was a Knight of the Shire in 1445/6 and then sat in Parliament as one of the King's Serjeants from 1459 to 1478. From 1469 to 1481 he was Chief Justice and for many years was a Justice of the Peace for six other counties in addition to Northamptonshire.<sup>22</sup>

By the late 1480s yet another new name had appeared in the county, this time to head commissions. Edward Stafford, second Earl of Wiltshire, was the only son of John Stafford and Constance Grene, the only child and heir of Henry Grene of Drayton. In 1488/9 Edward headed Richard, now Earl Ryvers, George, Lord Grey, John Grey of Wilton, Sir Nicholas Vaux, Sir Thomas Grene and Sir Guy Wolston on a commission to enquire into the number of archers in the county, preparatory to the expedition for the relief of Brittany.<sup>23</sup> On Edward's death, ten years later, Sir Nicholas Vaux seems to have emerged as leader of the county gentry in so far as commissions were concerned; a position reinforced by his elevation to the peerage as Lord Vaux of Harrowden in 1523.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *CFR 1461-1471*, p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> Northamptonshire seems to have had something of a tradition for producing candidates for the office of Chief Justice.

<sup>23</sup> Campbell, *Materials*, p. 385.

<sup>24</sup> Above, pp. 142-43..

Also by the late 1480s Northamptonshire had acquired a new name as Knight of the Shire; Sir Richard Empson was elected to Parliament, probably from 1489 to 1504,<sup>25</sup> and was Speaker in 1495. Unlike most of the other Members for the county, he was never chosen as Sheriff - perhaps indicative of a lack of the local influence necessary to fulfil the role, though the willingness of the local gentry to marry his children might suggest otherwise. It was certainly not lack of royal favour as other positions given to him show.<sup>26</sup>

More substantial and longer lasting newcomers on the scene were the Parrs, the Spencers and the Fermors. All three families were new to Northamptonshire itself as well as to offices there. The Parrs, though, were not actually new to the ranks of gentry or to public life. They had been Sheriffs and Members of Parliament for Cumberland and Westmorland for many years.<sup>27</sup> Both Sir Thomas Parr and his son, Sir William, supported the Yorkist cause from the beginning and William was rewarded with the office of Controller of the Household from 1472 to 1476 and from 1481 to 1483. The move to Northamptonshire was the result of the second marriage of Sir William's widow to Sir Nicholas Vaux.<sup>28</sup> Their background, wealth and links with the Lancastrian Vaux family soon established the Parrs in the ranks of the gentry for their new county and enabled them to make the transition to the Tudor regime. Sir Thomas was appointed Sheriff in 1509 and his son Sir William in 1517, 1521, 1533 and 1537. Like the Woodvilles before them they were clearly an influential family long before their links with royalty.

The Spencers, on the other hand, were newcomers in every sense. During the second half of the fifteenth century they moved from being minor Warwickshire graziers to wealthy landowners in Northamptonshire when John

<sup>25</sup> There is some doubt as various returns are missing.

<sup>26</sup> Above, pp. 68-71.

<sup>27</sup> They seem to interchange between the two counties. See above, p. 150.

<sup>28</sup> Above, pp. 150-51.

Spencer bought Althorp.<sup>29</sup> Their acceptance into the gentry community was very rapid and by 1511 John was already Sheriff of Northamptonshire. His son, Sir William, held that office in 1531 and a Spencer was to serve under every Tudor monarch. Sir William's son, John, was also elected as Knight of the Shire in 1554 and 1558 (and again in 1577 and 1583) and appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1554 and then from 1561 until his death. The ease of their transition into county society was no doubt helped by their wealth and by their marriage links with several established Northamptonshire families such as the Knightleys and the Treshams.<sup>30</sup>

Although the Fermors did not have the ancient lineage of the Parrs, their wealth also provided them with an entree into Northamptonshire's gentry ranks. They did have to wait some time before their position was more formally recognised by the election of John Fermor as a Member of Parliament for the county in 1553 and 1555. This was followed by his appointment as Sheriff in 1557 and as Justice of the Peace from 1556 to 1564. His uncle William had been Sheriff of Oxfordshire and Berkshire in 1533-34 and 1543-44 and represented Oxfordshire in the Parliament of 1539.

Another new family on the social scene towards the end of the fifteenth century were the Mordaunts of Drayton. They had long been established at Turvey in Bedfordshire but their power and influence only seemed to grow from the middle of the fifteenth century with the astute business and marriage deals of Sir John. Their presence in Northamptonshire gentry ranks is clearly indicated by further marriage and business dealings but their influence in official capacities remained largely within their home county of Bedfordshire. It is possible, however, that the first elections of John Mordaunt to Parliament, in 1485-86 and 1487, were for Grantham in Lincolnshire, a borough that he certainly represented in 1491-92. He was Speaker of the House in 1487 which would have made him

<sup>29</sup> Above, pp. 145-46.

<sup>30</sup> See Family Tree, Appendix 2g, p. 279.

the first borough member to be elected Speaker.<sup>31</sup> He was a Knight of the Shire for Bedfordshire in 1495 and was a Justice of the Peace for Bedfordshire and six other counties but never appointed Sheriff: an omission rectified by the appointment of his son, John, in 1509. This John was created a baron in 1532 and in 1554 appointed to Commissions of the Peace for his home county of Bedfordshire as well as for Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire. His son John inherited the barony having already been Sheriff of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire in 1537, Essex and Hertfordshire in 1538 and a Knight of the Shire for Bedfordshire in 1553/5.

Service outside of the county can also provide evidence of status in the broader arena. With their convenient position in the centre of England, we have seen that Northamptonshire men were well represented in direct service to the Crown and in other capacities. In the legal profession Anthony Catesby and Edmund Knightly were Serjeants-at-Law<sup>32</sup>, Sir John Catesby was a Justice of Common Pleas and Thomas Billing was Chief Justice. Sir Richard Empson and Sir Edmund Knightley held the position of Attorney General of the Duchy of Lancaster while Sir Richard went on to be Chancellor of the same. A position held at one time by William Tresham and Sir John Mordaunt. John Dyve was Attorney General to Edward IV's queen.

More personal service was provided by William Catesby and his son William, John Hulcote, Richard Middleton, Sir David Philip, Sir Thomas Tresham and Sir Guy Wolston as Royal Squires. Sir Ralph Hastings and Sir Nicholas Vaux were Knights of the Body, Robert Pemberton an Usher of the Chamber and Sir Richard Knightley a Gentleman Usher Extraordinary. The position of Constable of a royal castle was entrusted to Sir Ralph Hastings for Northampton 1463-74, Sir William Parr at Rockingham and Sir Guy Wolston at Fotheringhay. Ralph Hastings also served in a military capacity as Captain at Guisnes from

<sup>31</sup> Wedgewood, p. 608.

<sup>32</sup> A position held by Sir Henry Grene in the fourteenth century.

1474 to 1483 and again from 1484-85; while Sir Nicholas Vaux was made Lieutenant of Guisnes from 1502 until his death in 1523.<sup>33</sup>

Appointments of a more individual nature include Sir Thomas Tresham who was created Grand Prior of the Order of Saint John, in 1557, for the final stages of the monastic tradition.<sup>34</sup> During Edward IV's reign the Woodvilles held important positions and under Richard III, William Catesby was fairly briefly Chancellor and Chamberlain of the Exchequer. Sir William Parr had been Controller of the Household from 1472-76 and from 1482-83 and his son, Sir Thomas, held a similar position under Henry VIII. In turn, his son William Parr, was made a Privy Councillor to Henry in 1543 and created Earl of Essex in the same year. He was created Marquis of Northampton by Edward VI, soon after his coronation in 1546/7, and was made Lord-Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Northamptonshire and Norfolk in 1549.

To supplement the evidence of county and national officials, clues to wealth and status of individual families can be obtained from more substantial sources: the buildings, parks and monuments they have left behind. It has always been important for a family to demonstrate wealth in a tangible way. Unfortunately buildings are very much subject to the ravages of time and the mercies of succeeding generations. Many of the fifteenth and sixteenth-century houses that these families built have long since disappeared or been considerably altered and extended. On the other hand, the fact that there are survivals at all is indicative of a certain status, as very few lesser houses in the county escaped the great rebuilding of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For some of the buildings that have disappeared or changed we still have some evidence in the form of the eye witness accounts of antiquarians like John Leland and John Bridges.

Most of the better known grand houses of Northamptonshire are

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<sup>33</sup> Above, p. 143.

<sup>34</sup> Above, p. 137.

testaments to the success stories of generations of families whose rise in wealth and status came as Elizabethan, rather than early Tudor favourites. Of the two premier houses, Burghley was the creation of William Cecil, while Castle Ashby was built in 1574 for the Comptons.<sup>35</sup> Kirby Hall was built for Sir Humphrey Stafford and then bought by Sir Christopher Hatton of Holdenby House, and Boughton House was enlarged around monastic buildings by the Montagu family. In the upper ranks of houses, however, there are two which belonged to men who began to rise under the earlier Tudors. Althorp was built by Sir John Spencer in 1508,<sup>36</sup> but the present house was extensively altered in the late eighteenth century. On the other hand Deene Park was acquired by the Brudenells in 1514 and much of their sixteenth-century building improvements survive; no doubt because the Brudenells did not continue to make the advances in status enjoyed by the Spencers which meant that Deene remained appropriate to their situation.

Although much less well known because it is rarely open to the public, Drayton House is the equal in grandeur to those houses already mentioned.<sup>37</sup> It has been altered and extended many times, but sufficient remains of earlier buildings to give an indication of the social standing of earlier owners. The late thirteenth century undercroft and fourteenth century south wall of the medieval castle survive from the Drayton family ownership. The 'castle' was remodelled in the middle of the fifteenth century by Sir Henry Grene, whose rectangular towers at either end of the Great Hall can still be seen, as can the north wing of the Mordaunt family. Other evidence on Drayton House comes from John Leland who described it as "Draiton village and castell, the pratiest place in those

<sup>35</sup> For earlier indications of their position we need to look at Compton Wynyates in Warwickshire. L. Stone & J.C. Fawtier Stone have used Hearth Tax returns and estimates of liveable space to draw up league tables of houses in Northamptonshire. See their results in *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (Oxford, 1984), Table 2.7. Burghley House and Castle Ashby are the top two with 463 and 418 units of liveable space respectively.

<sup>36</sup> Above, pp. 157-58..

<sup>37</sup> It is third in the Stones' table with 335 units, ahead of Althorp with 290.



quarters" <sup>38</sup> and Halstead who said it was "... a fair and ancient castle, encompassed with four large high walls".<sup>39</sup> In common with all of the houses mentioned so far, the attractions of Drayton are increased by standing outside the village in its own extensive park - a status symbol in its own right.

While not as large as Drayton, the Knightley family home at Fawsley is also very attractive and stands in a park of nearly 700 acres: partly created by the desertion of the village of Fawsley.<sup>40</sup> It was built in the reign of Henry VII but was probably altered in the middle of the sixteenth century, after it was described by John Leland as "no very sumptuous thing".<sup>41</sup> A second Knightley home survives at Upton but here the original building has been overlaid by seventeenth and eighteenth century alterations though the medieval roof still exists. Of similar size and quality is the Tresham home at Rushton,<sup>42</sup> while the Catesby and Vaux residences at Ashby St Ledger and Great Harrowden respectively, though smaller, are still very attractive, but they too all owe more to late sixteenth and seventeenth-century builders than to medieval or early Tudor.

We get no indication from property of the importance of the senior line of the Grene family as any manor house at Greens Norton has vanished without trace, though a park of 200 acres is mentioned by John Bridges.<sup>43</sup> The houses of the Zouche family at Harringworth and the Empson/Fermors at Easton Neston have also vanished but here we do have some clues. The house at Harringworth was still in existence when Leland visited the county and he described it as a "... right goodly manor place"<sup>44</sup> while at Easton Neston, where the present house was built in 1702, John Bridges tell us that "The old seat, which was a large one,

<sup>38</sup> *Leland itinerary*, i, p. 6. It is not certain whether the 'village' was nearby Lowick or the estate cottages around the great house.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted extensively in Stoptford Sackville, *Drayton House*, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> With 136 units it is just behind Rockingham Castle with 140. See Stones table 2.7.

<sup>41</sup> *Leland itinerary*, i, p.10.

<sup>42</sup> It is estimated as 220 units, ahead of Boughton House with 180.

<sup>43</sup> Bridges i, p. 238.

<sup>44</sup> *Leland itinerary*, i, p. 13.

stood below the church in the park".<sup>45</sup>

The absence of any medieval building at Grafton Regis is particularly disappointing as we might have hoped for a substantial house to bear witness to the Woodville's status and royal connections. There is perhaps a hint of this on Christopher Saxton's map, where a larger building symbol than usual represents Grafton.<sup>46</sup> Some people suggest that it was pulled down to provide stone for Henry VIII's hunting lodge there, while Wakeling Dry is confident that it was plundered and burnt by the Parliamentarians in 1643 and that part of it makes up the existing modest manor house.<sup>47</sup> Similarly there is little building evidence to indicate the importance of the Parrs in the county. At Horton they probably rebuilt the house circa 1550-60 and it was extended in the early eighteenth century before being drawn by Peter Tillemans, but even that building has since been destroyed. Surviving earthworks on the site suggest gardens and a substantial park.<sup>48</sup>

An important part of the lifestyle of the upper classes in medieval England was the sport of hunting and deer parks were popular creations. The county of Northamptonshire is particularly well endowed with these parks. Twenty three can be identified on the map of Christopher Saxton and these are confirmed by John Speed.<sup>49</sup> These parks tend to cluster in the forested areas of the north east and south east, with a sprinkling in the West, and when we look at the distribution of the chief manors of those families who, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, held official positions in the county, there is a strong correlation.<sup>50</sup> In

<sup>45</sup> Bridges i, p. 289.

<sup>46</sup> *Christopher Saxton's 16th Century Maps*, introduced by W. Ravenhill, (Shrewsbury, 1992).

<sup>47</sup> W. Dry, *Northamptonshire* (London, 1906), p. 129.

<sup>48</sup> RCHM *Northamptonshire* ii, pp. 63-69; *Northamptonshire in the Early Eighteenth Century: the Drawings of Peter Tillemans and Others*, (ed.), B. Bailey, Northamptonshire Record Society vol. 39 (Northampton, 1996), p. 101.

<sup>49</sup> *Christopher Saxton's Maps; The Counties of Britain. A Tudor Atlas by John Speed*, introduced by N. Nicolson, (London, 1988). The exactness of location would suggest that Speed's map was based on Saxton though this is not acknowledged by Speed.

<sup>50</sup> See Appendix 8, p. 293.

fact many of these families had a deer park as part of their own estate. In the north east we find the Zouches at Harringworth and the Grenes at Sudborough (a part of the Drayton estate). In the south east were the Woodvilles at Grafton, the Empsons at Easton Neston and the Parrs at Horton, and in the west the Knightleys at Fawsley and the Spencers at Althorp all had deer parks of their own. In addition the Royal Commission on Historical monuments suggests that a further park might have existed at Sywell, the Tresham's home.<sup>51</sup> Many of these parks were of ancient foundation - maybe in some cases the estate was actually chosen for purchase by an aspiring gentleman because of the deer park, but Richard Empson, at least, created his own.

Religion was another key area of life and a family that wanted to establish a reputation (as well as save its souls) was often involved in contributing to church building or restoration, and almost always ensured that they were noticed and remembered in death by the construction of elaborate tombs in their local church. Monuments were important as they helped to establish the valued attribute of ancient lineage. Up and coming families even adopted previous monuments as their own. Churches near to great houses virtually became family mausoleums and particularly desirable was a private chapel to display this evidence of family importance. These tombs have proved a more enduring witness to family wealth and importance than the houses that they inhabited whilst alive.

In respect of church buildings three families stand out. The Grenes were responsible for a major rebuilding programme at the church at Lowick - the village near to Drayton House. This was begun towards the end of the fourteenth century by Sir Henry Grene, continued by his son Ralph and finished by his son Henry.<sup>52</sup> At Whiston, Anthony Catesby went one step further and built an entire church. It was begun the first decade of the sixteenth century and finished in

<sup>51</sup> RCHM *Northamptonshire* ii, p. 145.

<sup>52</sup> Above, pp. 18-19.

1534: the last example of perpendicular architecture in the county.<sup>53</sup> The monuments at Lowick are particularly impressive - remembering several members of the Grene family themselves and their successors, the Staffords and the Mordaunts. The monument to Sir Ralph Grene is particularly significant in that it appears to copy the style of the monument to the Richard II and his wife Anne in Westminster Abbey, showing the couple holding hands.<sup>54</sup> At Whiston the monuments are more restrained; the church itself being the memorial to the family's wealth and importance.

The Grene's wealth was also apparent in a series of monuments at Greens Norton but they were removed in the eighteenth century and the only survivors are the brass effigies of Sir Thomas Grene and his wife Maude and of Mary Talbot, the wife of another Sir Thomas. Catesby monuments can also be found at Ashby St Ledger with a canopied brass to William Catesby and his wife Margaret Zouche and another brass which is probably to his son George.<sup>55</sup> Both Sir Richard Knightley (died 1534) at Fawsley and Lord Parr (died 1546) at Horton have left impressive tombs, but the more impressive Stafford monuments are at the ancient family church at Pleshey in Essex while the Mordaunt wealth is best indicated by the monuments at Turvey in Bedfordshire.

Probably the most impressive set of family monuments in Northamptonshire are those in the family chapel of the Spencers in the church of Saint Mary at Great Brington - the village nearest to Althorp. A great marble tomb to Sir John Spencer (died 1522) and his wife Isabella lies in the first of the three arches which separate the chapel from the chancel. Although he died at the old family estate at Wormleighton, Sir John desired to be buried at Althorp: one could almost suppose that he was aware of the great dynasty that he was founding there. He left £20 for the tomb and a further £11 for the repair of the

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<sup>53</sup> Above, P. 124.

<sup>54</sup> Above, p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> Above, p. 125.

church itself.<sup>56</sup> Other monuments go on to reflect the growing status of later generations.

Yet another indication of status in the locality and beyond can be seen in the marriage ties of families. It is in this respect that the Woodvilles confirm their position at the top of the hierarchy. The marriage of Elizabeth Woodville to Edward IV is the most notorious of their matches but it was really the marriage of her father to the Duke of Bedford's widow, Jacquetta of Luxembourg, in 1436 that began the family rise above their gentry neighbours. From then on Richard Woodville's career took off and he was created Lord Ryvers in 1448. His children all married into the peerage - mostly above the rank of baron.

The other Northamptonshire families cannot match this pattern; their kinship networks being largely with knightly families and below. Their few ventures into the peerage were usually with each other such as the daughters of Lord Zouche marrying into the Catesby, Tresham and Grene families. In the middle of the fifteenth century the Grene's do give some clues to the regard in which they were held when one Sir Thomas married the daughter of Baron Talbot and another the daughter of Baron Ferrers.<sup>57</sup> Their most impressive match though was that of Constance Grene to John Stafford, the second son of the Duke of Buckingham, with money the apparent motivation for the Staffords.

Although they appear as leaders of the county gentry in some contexts, this is not really reflected in the marriages of the Vaux family. For them, money also seems to have been an important factor, as shown in the marriage of Sir Nicholas to a Grene heiress and then again when Maud married the wealthy Sir John Fermor.<sup>58</sup> The Parrs, on the other hand, had always done quite well in the marriage stakes. Several marriages into the nobility preceded Catherine's match with Henry VIII but that event certainly heralded an obvious rise in status for the

<sup>56</sup> PRO, PCC 24 Maynwaryng.

<sup>57</sup> Above, pp. 29-30.

<sup>58</sup> Above, pp. 144, 146.

whole family with her brother being created an earl and eventually made Marquis of Northampton.<sup>59</sup>

The Mordaunts' connections with the county emerge more through their marriage alliances than from their official positions. The marriages of John Mordaunt (first Lord Mordaunt) and his brother, Robert, to the Vere heiresses of Great Addington brought him indirect links with the Grenes, via their father, and their mother had been Isabella Tresham. John's son later married the sister of Sir Richard Fermor.<sup>60</sup>

When one takes into consideration all of the clues, rank must be given priority over obvious wealth. With this in mind, a hierarchy of Northamptonshire society in the fifteenth century could best be described as being led by the Woodvilles and Staffords, as their status was also recognised on the national scene. Although a baronial family from an early date, the Zouches never quite matched the same heights and neither did the Vauxes, who came through towards the end of the century as county leaders. Underneath this were the Treshams, Catesbys and Grenes with the Knightleys rising fast, and they were followed in the sixteenth century by the Parrs, especially after Catherine's marriage to Henry VIII. Also in the sixteenth century, the Spencers and the Fermors began to make an impression. Although important in national politics, Richard Empson made less impact on the leadership of his home county and another rising family, the Mordaunts, maintained Bedfordshire as their main power base even after making Drayton their home. This puts most of the ten families studied at, or towards, the upper end of the county hierarchy for at least part of the period under consideration.

Political allegiance did have some impact on county leadership with the staunchly Lancastrian Vauxes being the most obvious example of a family whose fortunes declined under the Yorkists. On the other hand a willingness to change

<sup>59</sup> Above, pp. 151, 154..

<sup>60</sup> See Appendix 4, p. 287 for details.

sides was amply rewarded in the case of the Woodvilles, whose long standing position at the upper end of the county hierarchy under Lancastrian kings was confirmed and extended under Edward IV, and the previously Yorkist Parrs moved into a position of leadership under the Tudors.

### **The local scene and central power**

It is important to look now at these families in a broader context. In many county histories there has been a tendency to look only at the local scene in isolation, either at the way that noble power was exercised and the impact of noble affinities upon gentry relationships, or by examining a county with preconceived ideas that it operated as a separate, autonomous unit. Christine Carpenter has recently made a plea for both groups to extend their interest to include an exploration of political structures from the centre of power to the localities, the response of localities and whether or not the operation of these relationships changed from the late medieval to early modern England.<sup>61</sup>

A first step in this direction is to look again at the nature of the contacts and relationships existing between central powers and local men. These would seem to fall into three broad categories. Firstly there was direct personal contact between the king or members of his immediate family, often, but not always, as a result of professional service. Secondly was contact that was still personal but operated through influential intermediaries, and thirdly comes contact of a formal administrative nature which owed more to local status than to personal relationships. Informal contacts were also possible as a result of Northamptonshire's popularity as a royal hunting ground. Edward IV reputedly met his queen near Grafton Regis, where Henry VIII went on to build a royal hunting lodge. There were also royal deer parks at Moulton, just north of Northampton itself, and in various other parts of the county.

<sup>61</sup> Carpenter, 'Who Ruled the Midlands', *Midland History* XIX, passim.

As has already been shown, almost all of the families in this study had royal contacts in the first category.<sup>62</sup> Some of these were of a purely private nature such as William Vaux, who married a lady-in-waiting of Henry VI's wife, Margaret of Anjou; or John Mordaunt III who married Richard Fermor's daughter, Joane, who was an attendant of Queen Mary when she was a princess. Thomas Tresham I was brought up in the household of Henry VI while William Vaux III's children, Nicholas and Jane, were brought up by Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII. Jane went on to become governess to Henry VII's daughters and Nicholas entertained the young Henry VIII at his Harrowden home in 1511. Likewise Richard Empson had played host to Henry VII at Easton Neston in 1507.<sup>63</sup>

Most of the direct contacts with the monarch and the centre of power, however, came through professional service. The Catesbys, Parrs, Treshams and Vauxes were all at some time members of the royal household, usually as Squires or Knights of the Body. William Parr II was Comptroller of the Household itself for Edward IV, while his eldest son, Thomas, held the same position for Henry VIII and his youngest son, William, was Chamberlain in the household of Henry's bastard son, the Duke of Richmond. Richard Knightley also seems to have performed occasional household service as he was described as a Gentleman Usher Extraordinary - apparently an unpaid post. Other families gained access to royal circles through their legal abilities. Henry Grene was an advocate of the dowager Queen Isabella, John Mordaunt and Richard Empson were counsellors of Henry VII and Edward Knightley was Queen's Council to Catherine of Aragon. In these capacities they were sometimes involved in the personal affairs of the royal family. For example John Mordaunt I helped to arrange the marriage of Henry VII's daughter to the King of Scotland.

The only family not to have any direct royal contact during this period was

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<sup>62</sup> Above, pp. 233-34.

<sup>63</sup> See family biography for details.



the Spencer family. Either they did not seek this out or they were not yet sufficiently important to be noticed by the Crown. It is perhaps significant that the early contacts with royal authority made by the merchant, Richard Fermor, were through intermediaries such as Cardinal Wolsey. Fermor's social standing would not, perhaps, have warranted more direct royal access. His usefulness to the Crown by way of personal wealth, and his influence with other merchants, however, led to Henry VIII taking a personal interest in him and intervening on his behalf in the matters of duty free exports from Flanders and compensation for piracy.<sup>64</sup> It was possibly Fermor's loans to Henry VIII that led to his daughter, Joane, becoming an attendant to Princess Mary. It is interesting to note that even men with apparent direct royal access also used intermediaries. Perhaps this was just social convention within a hierarchical system, but the fact that it seems to have been particularly true with Henry VIII adds weight to the popular view that factions began to control access to the king.

In this context it is no surprise that Cardinal Wolsey, and then Cromwell, were the men most commonly approached by Northamptonshire families seeking favours. John Mordaunt II offered Wolsey a bribe to be made Treasurer and Edmund Knightley petitioned him over the Earl of Oxford's estate.<sup>65</sup> The Fermor brothers benefited from Wolsey's patronage while Thomas Vaux attended him in France in 1527. After Wolsey's fall the Fermors soon transferred allegiance and began to benefit from links with Cromwell. Edmund Knightley also petitioned Cromwell to try to secure his own release from prison.<sup>66</sup> Later in his life, John Mordaunt II resorted to asking the Earl of Southampton to intercede with the King in his dispute over Drayton House.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps it was a sign of his declining favour that he needed to approach the King through a more modest intermediary.

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<sup>64</sup> Above, p. 85.

<sup>65</sup> Above, pp. 52, 110-11.

<sup>66</sup> Above, p. 112.

<sup>67</sup> Above, p. 57.

Gaining favour and possibly royal access through an intermediary, however, was not confined to the reign of Henry VIII. John Mordaunt probably came to the notice of Edward IV through his stewardship for Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, and William Catesby's connection with William Hastings probably led to him being appointed Chancellor to Richard of Gloucester in the earldom of March, and to him becoming a friend of Francis Lovell, who was himself close to Richard. Richard Empson was similarly advanced by men close to the Crown under Edward IV and Henry VII. A significant stage in the advancement of all of these men was their various appointments within the royal Duchy of Lancaster.<sup>68</sup>

The fact that nine out of ten families had quite significant contacts with royalty and the centre of power raises the question as to whether local importance brought royal notice or vice versa. In most cases the evidence seems to point to the former. It was important for the Crown to remain in touch with the country as a whole and, as Carpenter points out "Local gentry who were also royal servants were vital channels of royal authority".<sup>69</sup> The situation of lawyers may have been an exception to this pattern, however, as they were valued in the first instance for their legal skill. Ives suggests that "A lawyer could expect to be placed upon the Commissions of the Peace of his county once his status in the profession had been recognised, not when his position in the county justified the appointment".<sup>70</sup> There was a very strong relationship between the government of the country and the legal system, with similar links between administration and the law at county level. The judicial system provided a vital link between localities and the centre.<sup>71</sup> The fact that in England (unlike some European countries) lawyers maintained their contacts with their own localities made them potentially valuable to the Crown. This readier access to royal notice was one of the reasons that able lawyers like Richard Empson could make such rapid social

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<sup>68</sup> Above, pp. 174-75.

<sup>69</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 640.

<sup>70</sup> Ives, *The Common Lawyers*, p. 227.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

progress, as compared with an agricultural family such as the Spencers, whose political rise seems to have begun with local appreciation of their increasing wealth.

These Northamptonshire gentry families were certainly used by central powers in a variety of ways. This was demonstrated most significantly by appointments to commissions both within their own county and beyond, by other appointments such as Justices of the Peace and Escheators, and by being pricked as Sheriff of a county - not necessarily their own. Suggestions for the position of Sheriff emanated from the county concerned but the final decision rested with the monarch.

The status of these various offices changed over the years and J. R. Lander dates the importance of the gentry in running local affairs as early as the middle of the thirteenth century when Sheriffs began to be selected from their ranks. This was followed by an increase in the powers of JPs from the middle of the fourteenth century.<sup>72</sup> From the early fifteenth century, the position of Escheator declined in status and became the province of minor gentry, while in 1461 the Sheriff was subordinated to the Justices of the Peace, who were supposed to be worth at least £20 a year and residents of the county to which they were appointed, except for lords, judges and stewards of the Duchy of Lancaster.<sup>73</sup> The dominance of the gentry on the Bench is shown by Lander's analysis where they made up approximately 80% of the total members in the second half of the fifteenth century.<sup>74</sup> Over a quarter of these men were also Members of Parliament which is not surprising as Parliament had gradually increased its power and administrative influence throughout the reign of Edward IV, Richard III and Henry VII.

Lander suggests that several kings made attempts to interfere with the

<sup>72</sup> J.R. Lander, *English Justices of the Peace 1461-1509* (Gloucester, 1981), p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

composition of the county Benches by intruding loyalist outsiders in the late 1450s, the early 1470s and, even more determinedly, from 1493-4.<sup>76</sup> There is little evidence of interference in Northamptonshire in the late 1450s. In fact the early 1460s show more obvious changes with the Yorkist Duke of Norfolk being brought in and the Lancastrians, Sir Richard Woodville and Sir William Catesby, being temporarily dropped.<sup>76</sup> For Norfolk in the 1460s, C.E. Morton suggests that there was a tendency to pack the Bench with members of the aristocracy and Household servants and that few men could be described as Norfolk gentry.<sup>77</sup> In contrast, in 1454 the Northamptonshire Bench had twenty six members and only three of them were aristocracy - Richard, Duke of York, Humphrey, Duke of Buckingham and Richard, Earl of Warwick. As they were all on the Bench of other counties, their appointment was probably more in name than in reality. By 1460 the total had dropped to fifteen, but eleven of these men were the same as 1454. Edward, Earl of March had replaced the Duke of Buckingham and the Bishop of Lincoln represented the church. This is in keeping with Lander's estimates of 5% clerics and a similar percentage of peers.<sup>78</sup> From 1461 to 1467 the total numbers gradually rose from thirteen to twenty one but there were no dramatic changes in membership with the numbers of aristocracy and clergy remaining at three or four. Eight of the gentry members survived the change of monarch from 1460 to 1461 and these were all local men. Other locals from the Bench of the late 1450s were gradually brought back: Sir Richard Woodville and Henry Grene in 1463, Sir William Catesby and Sir Robert Isham in 1465 and Thomas Tresham in 1466. The most obvious intrusion into the county was Sir William Hastings whose brother had been given some of the Vaux estate at Harrowden.

There was a sharp drop in numbers under Richard III but little change in

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 5. He rejects the Perkin Warbeck scare as a reason for this and suggests that it was merely the result of the general atmosphere of suspicion that characterised the reign of Henry VII.

<sup>78</sup> See Appendix 10, pp. 296-99.

<sup>77</sup> C.E. Moreton, *The Townshends and their World: Gentry, Law and Land in Norfolk c 1450-1551* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 61-62.

<sup>78</sup> Lander, *English Justices*, p. 22.

the nature of the Bench. Edward, Earl of Kent, was the only aristocratic member and the other eight members were very clearly Northamptonshire gentry. All but John Catesby and John Longeville survived the change to Henry VII, and another local man, Guy Wolston, was brought in. By February 1486 Catesby and Longeville had been restored to the Bench. Total numbers crept up only slowly and by 1494 there were still only twelve members with only five survivors from 1485. In May 1493 Henry VII's trusted friend, Sir Reginald Bray, was intruded together with Sir Thomas Lovell, but these two men and others were appointed to seventeen other counties which would make their influence fairly negligible. By October 1496 there was an increase to twenty while the number representing the aristocracy and the church had gone up to seven and included several who had no links with the county or even with the Midlands - Arthur, Prince of Wales, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Marquis of Dorset. Once again, however, the rest of the Bench was made up of local men.<sup>79</sup> This gradual appointment of new men to the Commissions of the Peace from the 1470s seems to have been fairly widespread and possibly deliberate government policy. Anxious not to offend localities by major purges they "... diluted the old gangs" by new appointments.<sup>80</sup>

Northamptonshire numbers increased again and in 1524 there were twenty five members, but only four of them were nobility or church and eight were knights.<sup>81</sup> The knights and the other members were local with a fair proportion of them being lawyers which is what Moreton found in Norfolk. He suggests that the latter group were necessary because the work load had increased and become more specialised.<sup>82</sup> By July 1536 the total number had risen again to thirty three with seven members of the nobility or church, but this included two local lords -

<sup>79</sup> See Appendix 10c, p. 298.

<sup>80</sup> Lander, *English Justices*, p. 129.

<sup>81</sup> See Appendix 10d, p. 299.

<sup>82</sup> Moreton, *The Townshends*, p. 63. For the second half of the fifteenth century, Lander identified only about 8% of county Benches as lawyers. *English Justices*, p. 22.

John, Lord Zouche, and the recently created John, Lord Mordaunt. This time royal officials such as Sir Thomas Audley, Chancellor, and Sir William Fitzwilliam, Lord Admiral, added central weight to the Bench, but taken overall it would seem that Northamptonshire had few people from outside the county.<sup>83</sup> Mordaunt might be seen by some as an intruder from Bedfordshire but by then his house at Drayton had become his favourite home. Perhaps this relative lack of interference can be accounted for by the fact that the county was always divided in Yorkist versus Lancastrian loyalty, and so whichever house was in power there were sufficient supporters for it to feel secure. In fact Northamptonshire men were sometimes used to add weight to the Bench in other counties; most notably William Catesby under Richard III and Henry VII's servant, Richard Empson, in 1493.

Monarchs had a vested interest in the composition and working of county JPs. They would clearly have liked to exercise more control but were wary of making their interference too overbearing. Even Henry VII's effort of 1493-94 was very short lived. Cardinal Wolsey tried a more subtle approach when in 1526 he summoned JPs and Commissioners for the Collection of the Subsidy to attend a meeting at the Star Chamber. There he addressed them on their duties and responsibilities;<sup>84</sup> possibly a move to make them feel more a part of central power.

There was a marked increase in overall numbers of JPs from the 1530s but we can only speculate whether this was deliberate policy to reduce the risk of corruption by a small faction, a reflection of the increased work load, or a recognition of the increasing popularity of the position in terms of social prestige. The proportional representation throughout this period of magnates and churchmen, local knights and other local gentry remained fairly constant. With the exception of a few individuals who were particularly committed in political allegiance, membership of the Bench mostly transcended changes of monarch

<sup>83</sup> See Appendix 10d, p. 299.

<sup>84</sup> Lander, *English Justices*, p. 143.

and even dynasty. It was recognised that to indulge in wholesale dismissal and change would have been to make the Bench ineffective. Wright's comment that "A place on the bench was the consequence of local social and economic power, not vice versa" holds true for Northamptonshire.<sup>85</sup> Membership of the Bench was more limited than the upper ranks of county society as a whole. The legal families like the Catesbys and the Knightleys were most likely to be represented, often with more than one member of the family at one time, while the merchant, Richard Fermor, was never appointed.

The Commissions of the Peace were examples of men appointed by the Crown but operating within the counties. In theory an extension of central power into the localities, but as we have seen, the reality was rather different. Parliament was apparently the reverse. In theory the House of Commons was made up of two elected representatives from each county plus representatives of the county boroughs. This should have given people in the localities a voice in government, but in reality there was widespread abuse of the elective system. Voting rights were limited and, for the boroughs, very variable. It was sometimes possible for a powerful patron to secure the election to Parliament of a protégé who might not even have much connection with the county he was supposed to represent.<sup>86</sup> Charles Ross has suggested that the Crown itself managed to exert a strong influence, with Edward IV making sustained efforts to pack the Commons with Household men.<sup>87</sup> Moreton has certainly found a significant relationship in Norfolk between elections to Parliament and service in the royal household, and he suggests that even when magnates used their own influence, it was on behalf

<sup>85</sup> Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 101.

<sup>86</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 266.

There is evidence that in 1450 the Duke of York tried to influence elections in Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire by sending his auditor to visit Lord Zouche, Lord Lovel, Henry Grene and John [?] Vaux. McFarlane can find no other evidence that these men were supporters of the Duke, nor can he find particularly strong links between the men elected for these counties and the cause of the House of York.

McFarlane, *England in the Fifteenth Century*, pp. 233, 234.

<sup>87</sup> C.D. Ross, *Edward IV* (London, 1974), pp. 341-44.

of candidates acceptable to the Crown rather than for men of their own choice.<sup>88</sup>

Knights of the Shire for Northamptonshire certainly follow a similar pattern with most of them having royal connections, either through household service or via the Duchy of Lancaster. The position of Speaker of the House is particularly significant as here the king more overtly had an important input. The choice had political overtones as this was one of the ways that the king sought to influence Parliament itself. The numerous occasions that Northamptonshire men held this position indicates their acceptability to the Crown and maybe hints at royal influence in elections in the county. On the other hand, there is little evidence of magnate influence except by the Earl of Derby in the borough of Brackley. The power of Parliament was much more limited than it is today and it met much less frequently, but it was still important for good relationships to exist between it and the monarch, as only Parliament could raise money by taxation.

Apart from these established bodies, times of crisis are useful in providing evidence for how the Crown used men in the various counties to help to control the country. To combat the potential threat of the rising described as the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536, Henry VIII took various measures. The Earl of Wiltshire was directed to take three hundred men to Northampton by November 7th while the gentry, represented by Sir Thomas Griffith, Edmund Knightley, Edward Montagu, William Saunders, Richard Fermor, Thomas Andrews, Thomas Cave and Thomas Lovett, were ordered to gather supplies and victuals at Northampton for the King's army of 30,000 men. They seem to have complied with the order but rather unwillingly as they complained that they had assembled there for that purpose but that they had no indication of how long the army might be there nor what direction it would take. Communication was obviously a problem as they further complained that there were rumours that the rebels had already been defeated and they requested further orders.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Moreton, *The Townshends*, p. 57.

<sup>89</sup> LP 11, nos. 926, 931.



Dr George Bernard has recently warned against making too much of the idea that there was a major change in the relationship between the Crown and the nobility under the Tudors, with power shifting towards the gentry.<sup>90</sup> The example above shows that it was still the nobility that Henry VIII relied on for actual military support when he was in trouble but the gentry also played an important part.

#### **A county community?**

The notion of a county community as a significant concept in understanding the workings of a county as a whole has recently become fashionable among historians. The concept probably originated in the examination of the responses of county militia to the civil conflict of the seventeenth century, but does it have any real meaning in other contexts and other times? The answer would seem to rest on the choice and interpretation of the evidence. Even in seventeenth-century England the evidence is mixed. It is true that when one examines the allegiance of various county militia there seems to be support for one side or the other, but there is a danger of being swept away with this idea and ignoring the fact that both sides recruited in most localities and even families were split in allegiance.

In the dynastic upheavals of the fifteenth century it is difficult to identify any common locational trend, especially in the Midlands where both sides exercised control at different points in the conflict. Yorkist and Lancastrian sympathies seem to be fairly equally distributed amongst families and any detectable pattern is usually to be found in magnate affinities rather than county coherence. There might be an appearance of the latter when magnate influence and county boundaries coincide as with the Beauchamps in Warwickshire. In Leicestershire, Acheson found that even magnate allegiance was not clear cut

<sup>90</sup> G. Bernard, 'The Tudor Nobility', *History Review* no. 21, March 1995, pp. 1-4.

with various gentry serving the nobility in a professional capacity as lawyers, rather than the relationship being a military one. In this way men often served more than one lord and consequently had links with both sides.<sup>91</sup> A useful position to be in and one which enabled many of them to change sides when convenient or to maintain political neutrality. The Northamptonshire situation was complicated by the fact that the two most influential nobles in the county, Lord Grey and Lord Ryvers, changed sides quite early in the period. Grey betrayed the Lancastrian side at the Battle of Northampton in 1460 and the whole Woodville family became strong Yorkist supporters after the marriage of Elizabeth Woodville and Edward IV.

In Northamptonshire we can find examples of strong commitment to one side or the other, such as the Vauxes and Treshams who were firmly Lancastrian and actively fought for Henry VI and Henry Tudor.<sup>92</sup> The granting of Vaux land to the brother of Lord Hastings was probably a deliberate policy to strengthen Yorkist support in the county. There were men who changed sides when convenient like the Woodvilles, Mordaunts and Catesbys from Lancaster to York (and in some cases back again) and the Parrs from York to Lancaster (no doubt helped by the marriage of Sir William Parr's widow to the Lancastrian Sir Nicholas Vaux). Then there are those who had little involvement either way such as the Knightleys and the Spencers. Perhaps the fact that marriages readily took place between families with opposing views is indicative of people keeping their options open.

This lack of political coherence amongst the Northamptonshire families as a whole is also true of the men elected to Parliament as Knights of the Shire. Sometimes there was one Lancastrian and one Yorkist, and sometimes both favoured the same side. On the other hand, as one might expect of men appointed directly by the king, Sheriffs were usually men who had supported the

<sup>91</sup> Acheson, *A Gentry Community*, p. 94.

<sup>92</sup> See family biographies for details.

dynasty currently in power or who had had the prudence to quickly change sides.

In the broader political sense, therefore, there is no doubt that it is impossible to talk about a county community acting with any degree of unity. At a purely local level, however, there is equally no doubt that throughout the fifteenth century and, indeed, in earlier periods, social control was in the hands of a small group of families who held offices such as Sheriff and Justice of the Peace, represented the county in Parliament and were members of the various commissions set up to investigate or control particular affairs at a local level. Membership of this group changed over time as some families declined or died out and others rose to prominence, but the degree of continuity made it a recognisable force.<sup>93</sup> At this administrative level, therefore, it would seem at first sight that we can talk about a county community.

Closer inspection, however, reveals a more complex picture. As discussed earlier, we can look beyond the county boundaries and soon see that the positions held by many members of this group were not exclusive to Northamptonshire. This was probably to be expected in the upper levels of the group as, with their largely invisible boundaries, the midland counties had always been controlled on a broad regional basis by powerful families such as the Hastings and the Greys, with the Woodvilles joining their ranks in the fifteenth century.<sup>94</sup>

In the next rank, the Treshams (in 1445 and 1457) and the Vauxes (in 1452) were Sheriffs for Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire and in 1458 Sir Thomas Tresham was also Sheriff for Surrey and Sussex. Before being clearly linked with Northamptonshire, Henry Grene was a Member of Parliament and Justice of the Peace for Wiltshire. The Treshams (in 1448), the Grenes (in 1456) and the Vauxes (in 1457) were all Escheators for Rutland as well as

<sup>93</sup> See above for discussion on county hierarchy, pp. 222-42.

<sup>94</sup> Woodville influence in Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and, more surprisingly, Kent, is indicated by leadership of commissions in these counties.

Northamptonshire. Sir William Catesby held the Sheriff's office for Herefordshire (1458-9 and 1478-9) and was Member of Parliament for Warwickshire(1449-50), and Sir David Philip was Sheriff for Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire(1498-9).<sup>95</sup> Maybe the crossing of county boundaries even at this lower social level should not be too surprising as few landowners of any significance held all of their estates in a single county. Some holdings could be quite far afield eg. the Grenes with land in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Huntingdonshire and Wiltshire as well as Northamptonshire.<sup>96</sup>

The property dealings that have been examined in some detail would suggest that this spread was not entirely from choice. Landowners were always keen to consolidate around their main residences and bought up land and property whenever possible, but it must be remembered that not all land could be bought and sold as simply as it is today. Much of it was entailed and could only pass to 'right heirs'. Marriage played a major role in distributing ownership of estates around the country eg. the Mordaunts gained land in Dorset through marriage to the Latimers while the Parrs of Kendal gained a foothold in Northamptonshire when Thomas married Maude Grene.

As indicated earlier, for a system of social control to work effectively the men who were appointed to positions of power must also have some influence in the locality, but the confidence of the Crown was also important as the appointments had to be confirmed by the reigning monarch. Some compromise between these possibly opposing interests must sometimes have been necessary. On the other hand one might have expected that men chosen to represent the county in Parliament would have been local as they were elected by members of the county community. Even here, however, the situation was blurred. Unlike many counties, parliamentary elections in Northamptonshire

<sup>95</sup> See individual family biographies above.

<sup>96</sup> See above, p.19; *IPM* Vol. XVIII, 1-6 Henry IV 1399-1404, nos. 326-34.

were not controlled by resident peers,<sup>97</sup> but patronage did play a part and the Sheriff who actually supervised the election could have some influence. There is also some evidence of efforts being made to ensure that one MP was from the west of the county and one from the east which exercised some degree of internal control.<sup>98</sup>

The Treshams had a long history of parliamentary service with William representing Northamptonshire for over twenty six years from 1428 -1449; at least four times being elected Speaker of the House. His son and grandson followed him into the Commons. For the latter, the family name and standing in the county would probably have ensured his election, but he had the added bonus of the support of his father-in-law, Sir William Parr, who was serving his second term as senior Knight of the Shire. In the following Parliament of 1542, Tresham succeeded Parr as senior knight but after failing to be elected in 1547 (possibly because of his Catholicism) he turned his attention to Lancaster for the Parliament of October 1553. His distant kinship with Edward Stanley, third Earl of Derby, might have helped in this election as he had no obvious links himself with that county.

In the March election of 1553, Nicholas Throckmorton had been the somewhat surprising choice as senior Knight for Northamptonshire. Throckmorton, a younger son of an established Warwickshire family, did own some land in the county at Paulerspury and the family was connected by marriage to several of the Northamptonshire gentry, but his election was probably due more to the direct intervention of the Duke of Northumberland. Throckmorton's name was included on a Council letter recommending selected gentlemen be returned to Parliament as a favour for good service.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>97</sup> With the exception of Brackley which came under the control of Edward Stanley, third Earl of Derby.

<sup>98</sup> Bindoff i, p. 155.

<sup>99</sup> Bindoff iii, p. 459. Throckmorton was returned for six Parliaments from six different places - Maldon 1545, Devizes 1547, Northants 1553 (March), Old Sarum 1553 (October), Lyme Regis 1559, Tavistock 1563.

In spite of examples like Throckmorton, however, the evidence overall for Northamptonshire does support the view that offices and positions usually went to men who already had influence and standing within the county. On the other hand the evidence also suggests that the positions themselves meant more to the men concerned than feelings of loyalty to the shire. They were quite prepared to accept positions in other counties, and even in more than one county at the same time. The intrusion into Northamptonshire of men from elsewhere suggests that this was a common picture and, indeed, examples like Sir William Gascoigne abound. He was Sheriff for Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire in 1506/7, 1513/14, 1517/18; for Northamptonshire in 1518/19; Justice of the Peace for Bedfordshire from 1510 until his death, for Northamptonshire from 1512 until his death, for Middlesex from 1524-28, for Buckinghamshire from 1525 until his death and had isolated terms for other counties. He was also on commissions for Bedfordshire, Yorkshire, Huntingdonshire and Northamptonshire.<sup>100</sup> If evidence from only one county in isolation is examined then this kind of pattern is not revealed and a false impression of community can be arrived at.

A further complication to the pattern is the fact that local office was often combined with involvement in national affairs, which makes it questionable as to how active a part these men really played in the locality. The appointments were more a sign of their status and favour. Office, wherever it might be, could be a stepping stone to advancement - patronage from above and gifts from below.

If these men had no really strong commitment to a county how did they relate to each other? Were there any ties that bound men to each other as a group with common interests or to those with whom they had bonds of patronage? The simple answer must be only if it suited them. The evidence supports Dr. Williams observation that the

... essential dynamic was not class solidarity or mutual self interest but rather cut-throat competition, infra class rivalry and the need for

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<sup>100</sup> Bindoff ii, pp. 194-95.

protection against avaricious neighbours.<sup>101</sup>

There are many examples of families within the gentry class trying to take advantage of each other - most notably the Mordaunts and the Knightleys who were consistently involved in litigation with neighbours. Advantage was also taken under the guise of friendship as when the Fermors set very harsh conditions for Thomas Empson to buy back his estate while apparently helping him at a time of cash problems.<sup>102</sup>

Kinship seems to have been the strongest bond and several families benefited from the marriage of Catherine Parr to Henry VIII and the subsequent rise of the Parrs themselves. Nephews, in-laws and step-brothers all saw an advancement in their fortunes. Even the closest of kinship ties, however, were no guarantee of mutual support. For example there were obvious signs of self interest being promoted in the sometimes strained relationships of the Mordaunt fathers and sons.

Perhaps surprisingly, the one significant departure to the pattern of relentless self interest was in the matter of religion. History might give the impression that the majority of the country went along with the break with Rome with little protest, but this was not true of many leading Northamptonshire families. Of the main families studied who survived into the sixteenth century, all remained actively faithful to Catholicism, even at great cost to their position and fortune.<sup>103</sup> In the case of the Mordaunts this was very much at odds with the ruthlessness shown by them in other affairs. On the other hand there is no indication that there was any county solidarity in this stance; it appears to be entirely a case of individual conscience.

The overall picture one gets of the county community of Northamptonshire is of a loose knit group of families, bound together by a network of kinship ties,

<sup>101</sup> Williams, 'The Catesbys 1485-1568', in *Early Tudor England*, p. 207.

<sup>102</sup> See family biographies above.

<sup>103</sup> See particularly the Fermors above.

whose activities spread fairly indiscriminately over county boundaries and even further afield. It is probably true to say that any official positions that they held were more likely to be in the county that they regarded as their base than elsewhere, but there are many examples of this pattern being ignored in the face of self interest.



## CONCLUSIONS

In his book on the Leicestershire gentry in the fifteenth century, Acheson has suggested that it is difficult to follow McFarlane's dictum and make ourselves familiar with the lives and achievements of the gentry. He attributes the tendency to concentrate on the gentry's economic activities to the lack of evidence of them as fully rounded human beings.<sup>1</sup> It is true that few sources are so rich or so readily accessible as those of the Pastons, but personal letters and papers do survive in many family archives and also in collections of State Papers. It is a time consuming job to follow these up and so the number of gentry families that have been studied in this way is still limited. The effort is worthwhile, however, as the insights revealed by this kind of in depth research do make an important contribution to our understanding of the internal workings of society.

Although this study began by focusing on only ten families, the importance that has been demonstrated of their standing in the society of Northamptonshire and bordering counties, gives a significance to any conclusions well beyond a simple head count. During certain periods individual families were more, or less, important as their own fortunes fluctuated, but taken as a whole they represent the core of the county elite over a long period. The section on county leadership gives details of the evidence examined in this respect and sets out the changing hierarchy.<sup>2</sup> The position of these families can be emphasised by a further

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<sup>1</sup> Acheson, pp. 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> Above pp. 222-42.

analysis of the list of gentry in Appendix 7.<sup>3</sup> While they represent only one tenth of the families on the list, they account for two fifths of the actual names. In addition they are closely related by marriage to another tenth of Northamptonshire's gentry, and to leading families in other counties.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from the Empsons, these families held positions of power over more than one generation, extending over many years and across different reigns. The Grenes, Catesbys, Treshams and Vauxes were on the Commissions of the Peace for Northamptonshire in 1454 and, although there were some years when their names did not appear, all of these families were still represented in 1504. Only the Grays, earls of Kent, and the Woodvilles come near to matching this record. All of the other families on the 1454 list had disappeared before 1485. By this time Richard Empson had joined this elite group, which dominated the Bench during the first ten years of the reign of Henry VII. The only family from the 1450s to survive until 1536 were the Treshams but by then they had been joined by the Parrs and the Knightleys. Many other members of the Bench for that year were related by marriage to this group.<sup>5</sup>

It can be claimed, therefore, that conclusions drawn in respect of these families are fairly typical of Northamptonshire's gentry as a whole and can be used to support or contrast with evidence from other counties. In the same way, comparisons have constantly been made with a range of counties. In particular with the county studies on Warwickshire, Derbyshire, Norfolk, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. While these studies have not covered exactly the same period, nor taken the same approach, there is enough common ground to make useful comments.<sup>6</sup>

The prime significance of physiological factors in respect of survival has

<sup>3</sup> Below pp. 292-93.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendices 2a-2h, *Family Trees*, pp. 272-82, and Appendix 4, *Family Relationships*, p. 287.

<sup>5</sup> For details see the lists of Commissioners of the Peace - Appendix 10, pp. 296-99.

<sup>6</sup> See Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*; Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*; Moreton, *The Townshends*; Payling, *Political Society*; Acheson, *A Gentry Community*.

been the overwhelming conclusion reached by everyone looking at family fortunes. These families do not actually deviate from this pattern, but neither do they add a great weight of evidence in this respect. The only reason that any of these families disappeared completely from the Northamptonshire scene was their failure to produce male heirs, but this only affected two of the families - the Grenes and the Empsons.<sup>7</sup> In most cases the effects of the physiological failure of one line were softened by the existence of brothers or nephews to carry on the family for at least a few more generations. This could often strengthen the family position as wealth was consolidated rather than dispersed. This was particularly true of the Fermors and the Knightleys.<sup>8</sup>

None of these comments is intended to suggest that physiological factors are not crucially important in family survival, merely to point out that the situation is more complex than might at first appear. Even when a family name disappears, a considerable degree of continuity with the estate itself might exist through the female line. The Grene wealth passed intact first to the Staffords and then to the Mordaunts, whose eventual descendants, the Stopford-Sackvilles, live at Drayton House today.<sup>9</sup> Similarly the Fermors married into the Hesketh family who still occupy a house at Easton Neston and continue to be influential in local and national affairs.<sup>10</sup>

Other possible physiological problems are even less evident. Although inheritance by minors was a feature of several family histories, the potential damage that this could do to a family estate does not seem to have materialised to any significant extent. Often well disposed relatives took over the guardianship or a family sought kinship with a family strong enough to maintain the

<sup>7</sup> This contrasts with Payling's findings. He argues that in Nottinghamshire, wealth was consolidated in a decreasing number of families because of the frequency of family extinction. Payling, *Political society*, p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> See above biographies for details.

<sup>9</sup> This house has never actually been sold since it was first established about 1300.

<sup>10</sup> This house was finished in 1702 to replace the original house of Richard Empson. The full name of the family is still Fermor-Hesketh.

inheritance.<sup>11</sup> In one case, John, Earl of Wiltshire, commended his young son to the care of his mother, a member of the powerful Stafford family, rather than to his wife.<sup>12</sup> In another example, Sir Nicholas Latimer in all probability sought a marriage for his daughter with the Mordaunts because ownership of his estate was already in dispute.<sup>13</sup> This emphasises the importance of strong kinship networks; families had to stick together or risk decline. It was particularly important that brother should support brother.<sup>14</sup> William Fermor's role in his brother Richard's affairs exemplifies how crucial this support could be.<sup>15</sup>

The increased physiological threat to family survival because of violence, reputedly associated with the Wars of the Roses, and with the policies of Tudor monarchs, is another problem that may have been overstated. The importance attributed to the risks of these situations seems to change from time to time, but for these particular families, actual survival problems were slight. Men were certainly killed in battle or executed during the Wars of the Roses, but they all had heirs whose rights to succeed to family estates were eventually recognised, though the restoration was more complete when there was a change of dynasty.<sup>16</sup>

Physiological factors could also include character and there is some evidence to link success with strong minded and even ruthless individuals. Several of the families certainly achieved their most rapid advancement when men of this calibre were alive; notably William Catesby, John Mordaunt and his son, Richard Empson and Edmund Knightley<sup>17</sup>. Although evidence on character

<sup>11</sup> As in the case of the Latimers and the Mordaunts.

<sup>12</sup> Above, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Above, pp. 42-43.

<sup>14</sup> The alternative can be seen in the fate of the Yorkist dynasty!

<sup>15</sup> Above, pp. 91-92.

<sup>16</sup> See the Vaux, Tresham, Catesby and Empson biographies. The Vauxes and Treshams were fully restored after the Lancastrian victory at Bosworth but the Catesby and Empson families suffered from financial problems even though their lands were largely restored.

<sup>17</sup> The family biographies detail events where all of these men clearly pursued dubious means to gain advantage for themselves.

is elusive, and only four families can be positively identified as exhibiting ruthless characteristics, they do include most of those families where the evidence is strong enough to make reasonably confident judgments about such an intangible factor as character. Other men might have been included if we knew more about them or their actions. It might be unfair, however, to even consider the Vauxes and Fermors in this category, especially with regard to ruthlessness. The Vauxes are noted most for their steadfast loyalty to the Lancastrian cause and the Fermor brothers, Richard and William, remained supportive of each other and true to their Catholic faith. Loyalty was a characteristic to be valued and respected and was sometimes rewarded even by kings, who hoped to turn it to their own advantage.

It is difficult to arrive at any actual measure of family wealth. *Inquisitions post mortem* taken on the death of a landowner give some indication of the value of that part of their estate held under the Crown, but they become less reliable in the Tudor period and other assets are impossible to calculate. Some families provide clues to their broader wealth and the existence of available money by the nature of bequests made through their wills. Some show clearly that they own enough disposable wealth in the form of jewellery and plate to give them access to ready cash, but others use catch all phrases like 'residue' which could mean anything. Under the Tudors, wealth became particularly significant as offices could be bought by those with the requisite means.

There are indications that during the second half of the fifteenth century all of the families were enjoying a period of success for they were buying new land or consolidating estates by exchanging blocks of land. Both of these circumstances can be seen in the Empson, Mordaunt and Knightley families.<sup>18</sup> This situation continued into the sixteenth century for most of the surviving families, but the Empsons and Catesbys began to sell. The marked increase in

<sup>18</sup> See individual biographies for details of family transactions, and pp. 200-05 for a general discussion on land purchases.

Empson success had been based entirely on the talents of Sir Richard Empson and, with his execution in 1510, decline was equally swift. Catesby fortunes had a much more established base with their respected lineage and wide kinship networks. These features probably slowed down their decline but decline they certainly did. Their fate illustrates the importance of royal favour or, in their case, the lack of it. Even money was not enough to ensure success; favour was necessary for a family even to be allowed to buy their way forward.

Royal favour was acquired in a variety of ways. Some families earned it by loyalty and military service, others provided Household service (especially as children). A few possibly bought favour with their wealth, but for the majority it was largely achieved via professional contacts and involvement in local office holding. The topographical situation of Northamptonshire most likely played a part in many of these arenas. Roads to Westminster were accessible and journeys relatively short.

On the professional front the law must be seen as a very significant factor in advancing family fortunes. Only the Parrs and Spencers seem never to have been part of the legal profession, and for fifty percent of the families it was the single most important factor in their acquisition of wealth and status. Not only did it enable them to make money directly, it also brought some of them to lucrative offices in the judiciary and others into the service of the Duchy of Lancaster - crucial steps on the ladder of fortune. The access that both of these routes gave to patronage and to the royal court itself were essential for men of ambition. Enclosure and sheep farming played an important part in adding to fortune of many families, but apart from the Spencers it was not the central one.<sup>19</sup> Agriculture might make a family very wealthy but it did not bring the vital contacts necessary for real success. For this the Spencers relied on marriage but their wealth did enable them to buy positions when they were ready to move forward.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion on the various routes that families took to advance their fortunes see above, pp. 163-78.

Marriage is a significant feature in any family history. The alliances formed provide the networks of friends and supporters vital to success. Marriage was also often an important direct contributor to family wealth, either by design or by fortuitous circumstances. The Northamptonshire families studied seem to have been more willing to look beyond their immediate locality for marriage partners than families from Warwickshire and Derbyshire. Some families may have been content with local marriages, but this does not seem to have been the general pattern.<sup>20</sup> All of the families studied had contacts further afield. Many of these relationships were established through the legal scene, by membership of Parliament or via service in the royal household. All of these circumstances were also true of many other county families as the list of gentry shows.<sup>21</sup> The very fact that so many of these families were lawyers perhaps influenced their actions, as England's lawyers seem to have adopted a deliberate policy of intermarriage.<sup>22</sup>

There is some evidence that marriage was also used as a means of increasing family status, through the acquisition of ancient lineage or by marriage into a higher strata of society. For example the Catesbys married into the baronial Zouche family, while the Catesbys themselves became the target of the ambitious Empsons and Spencers.<sup>23</sup> It is not always possible to identify what advantage the superior family derived from these alliances. Sometimes one can only presume that actual attraction was involved.<sup>24</sup> In other situations the driving force was clearly financial, as with the Grenes and the Staffords. In the case of under age heirs, advantage was often taken of the situation, by wealthy social climbers, to buy the guardianship and marriage of the heir; sometimes to his social detriment.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion on marriage patterns, see above, pp. 179-200.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix 7, pp. 291-92.

<sup>22</sup> See above for a discussion of this issue, p. 200.

<sup>23</sup> Above, pp. 122, 74, 159.

<sup>24</sup> See again the example of the Catesbys and the Zouches.

The relationship between family fortune and national events has been a major focus throughout this study, but the evidence for links is elusive. Only two families, the Treshams and the Vauxes, showed significant fluctuations in fortune during the Wars of the Roses and even then the pattern is variable. The Vauxes were at a low ebb for the whole period from 1460 to 1485 but, before the dramatic events leading to the Readeption, the Treshams began to enjoy the beginnings of a return to favour under the Yorkists. One or two other families such as the Parrs and the Catesbys suffered minor setbacks, but soon accommodated to the new regime. Several families such as the Grenes, Mordaunts, Knightleys, Fermors and Spencers were apparently not affected at all.<sup>25</sup> There were danger points, however, as was shown in a previous chapter.<sup>26</sup> Any change of monarch was a potential threat to continuing favour and even to survival, as Richard Empson discovered to his cost.

Maybe the key question to ask is why some families did not suffer to the extent that might have been expected? A consistent theme in studies of the Wars of the Roses has been the attitude of the Crown to the powerful landowners. It was of mutual benefit for an incoming king to reach an understanding with these men. Both sides had too much to lose from the alternative. Something of the same attitude also shows at gentry level. Families such as the Treshams had a long established and powerful influence within their own localities and kings needed the support of the masses as much as that of the nobility.

In a small way these findings contribute evidence to the view that the civil wars of the fifteenth century did not have the dramatic effects that were at one time claimed in respect of family fortunes. As for the notion of a rising gentry under the Tudors, the facts do little to support this proposition. Many of the families continued a steady rise through the first half of the sixteenth century but

<sup>25</sup> See the discussion on the timing of the rise and fall of families for details. Above, pp. 212-20 and Appendix 6, pp. 289-90.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



this was just a continuation of earlier trends. The one man to reach a level of importance during the Tudor period was William Parr, Marquis of Northampton, but his rise was clearly the result of his sister becoming the sixth wife of Henry VIII rather than him being typical of his class. If we look further ahead, to the reign of Elizabeth I, we can find other examples of Northamptonshire men rising rapidly. Sir Christopher Hatton and Lord Cecil of Burleigh fall into this category but maybe they were also exceptions rather than the general rule. There have always been individuals who were able to seize the opportunity to make striking changes in their fortune and status.

If a significant rise in the gentry cannot even be identified, then clearly the Dissolution of the Monasteries did not have the impact on Northamptonshire that is sometimes claimed for the country as a whole. Some of the families were granted the rights to purchase monastic lands, but this was on a fairly modest scale and without any obvious accompanying change in status. Similarly, the evidence does not support views that attitudes to the church or the monastic orders were changing to show dissatisfaction and disillusionment. Support for both of these aspects of religion continued unabated as indicated by monetary bequests and church building. To the English people religion was a habit, and support for religious foundations a social expectation. Feelings for these establishments were not deeply held, however, and there was comparatively little outcry over moves to destroy them. A man's own faith was a different matter. There is unexpected evidence that some families were prepared to risk royal displeasure by maintaining their Roman Catholic faith long after the Reformation. Perhaps even more surprisingly, these were often the same families that had most readily accepted the changes of dynasty of the previous century in the pursuit of self interest. This is particularly true of the Mordaunts and the Fermors.<sup>27</sup>

The notion of a county community has come under severe attack in recent

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of religious issues see above, pp. 210-12 and 238-40.

years and these families add to the evidence against it being a significant force. Local networks were formed by marriage and business but these seem to have been the natural ones of neighbours operating in the same part of the country. County boundaries were readily crossed in these associations with no sign that they presented any obstacle. Opportunity and flexibility were the overriding forces. A group of men can be identified as regularly holding official positions in Northamptonshire but, once again, the county ties were fairly loose. Influence in the locality was an important consideration in some of these appointments but influence was not constrained by 'invisible boundaries', and even when landed interest in a county was a criterion of appointment, many men with quite modest estates held land in more than one county. It is true to say that appointments within, or representation of, the county in which a man had his major residence were the most common, but the exceptions are too numerous to claim that 'community spirit' was something that exercised a major influence on society. It is more likely that self interest was paramount. One has only to look at examples like Sir William Catesby who was a Member of Parliament for Northamptonshire in 1449 and later in the same year sat for Warwickshire; Thomas Tresham who was the Sheriff of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire in 1457 and of Surrey and Sussex in 1458; or Lord Mordaunt who was Sheriff of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire in 1537 and of Essex and Hertfordshire in 1538, to make a nonsense of the idea of the county as a cohesive force.<sup>28</sup>

The actual control of a county is another controversial area. Was it the aristocracy or the gentry? The evidence so far supports the findings of Wright and Payling that it was the gentry who held the power, rather than a natural hierarchy led by the aristocracy as emphasised by Carpenter. There is very little indication of dealings between the two groups in so far as Northamptonshire is concerned.

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<sup>28</sup> See above, pp. 252-59.

Not even the "bonds of association forged in daily association" as she suggests.<sup>29</sup>

No members of the major aristocracy lived in the county and there are only a few examples of men being retained by any great lords.<sup>30</sup> Maybe the strength of the earldom of Warwick distorts the picture for that particular county.<sup>31</sup>

While tentative patterns in behaviour and success have been suggested, perhaps the most lasting impression left by this examination of a group of Northamptonshire families is one of individual peculiarities rather than shared experiences. Foremost among these are the fascinating affair of Edward Stafford's will, and the rejection of one of Henry VII's most trusted supporters, Richard Empson, by the young King Henry VIII. The acquisition of such exceptional wealth by a comparatively minor gentry family as the Grenes, and the inexplicable match between the daughter of the Earl of Oxford and Edmund Knightley, are also worthy of note. Common patterns, if indeed they exist at all, are more complex than historians have so far suggested. Family fortunes seem to exhibit a capricious element which does indeed "... twist each case into something of a sport".<sup>32</sup>

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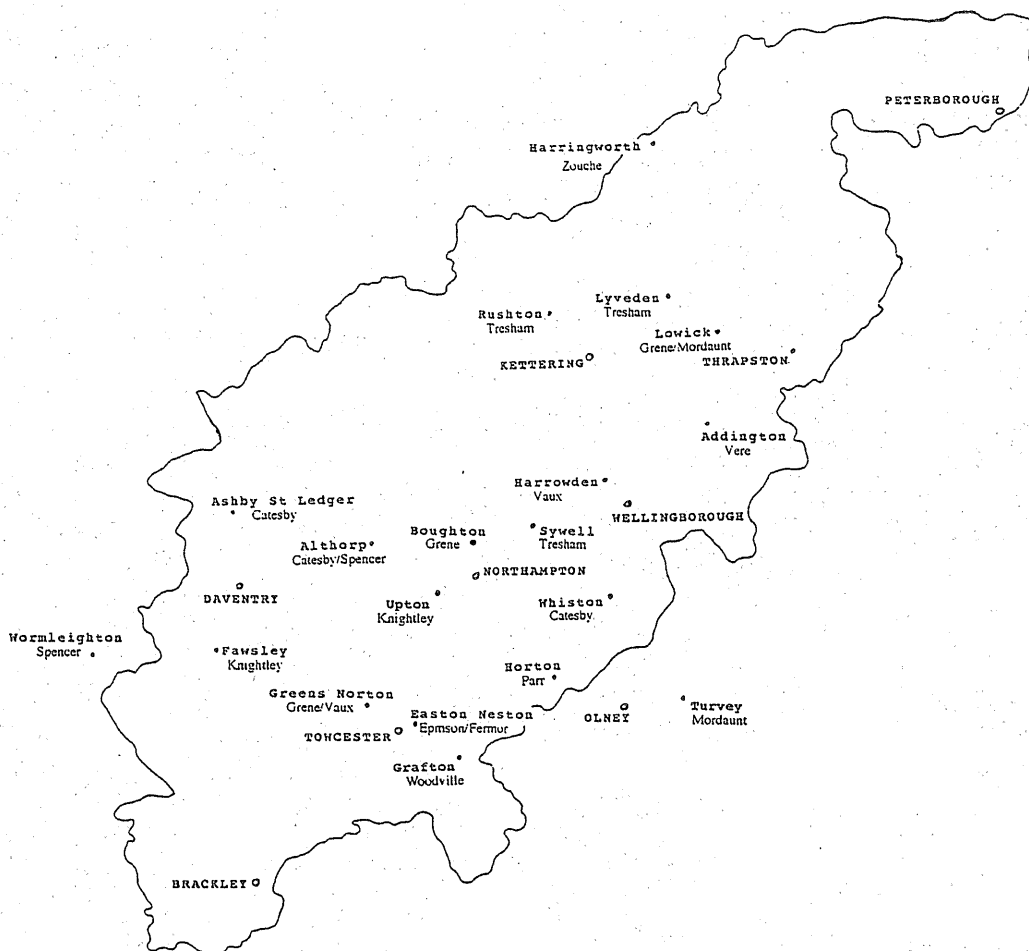
<sup>29</sup> See above, pp. 203-05.

<sup>30</sup> There are a few examples of retaining by the Duke of Buckinghamshire. Above, p. 223.

<sup>31</sup> Payling makes the same point - that marked differences in the distribution of the residences of the greater baronage, creates differences of opinion over who exercised power in a particular county. The weight of evidence so far is tending towards a view that counties dominated by the baronage in the fifteenth century are the exception rather than the rule. Payling, *Political Society*, p. 88.

<sup>32</sup> L. Stone, *Family and Fortune*, p. xv.

APPENDIX 1  
MAIN RESIDENCES OF NORTHAMPTONSHIRE FAMILIES



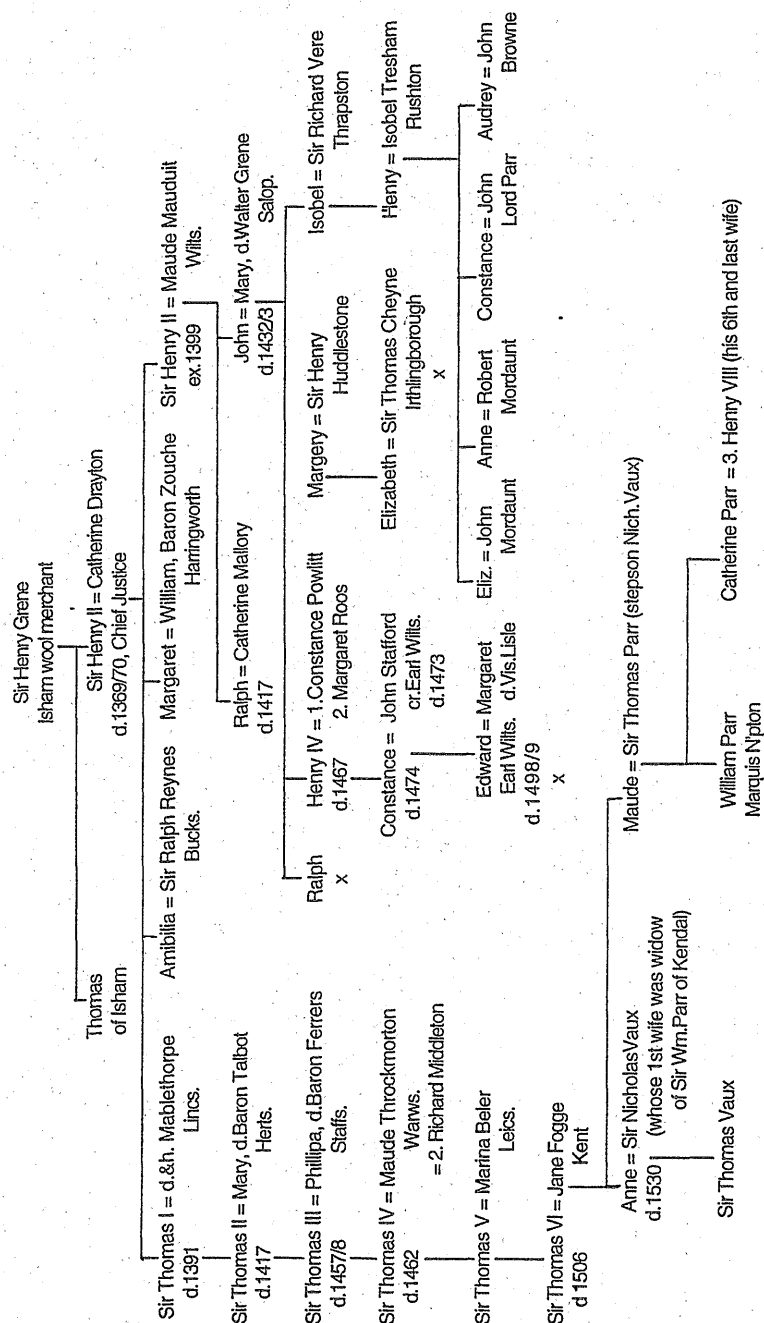
**APPENDIX 2            FAMILY PEDIGREES**

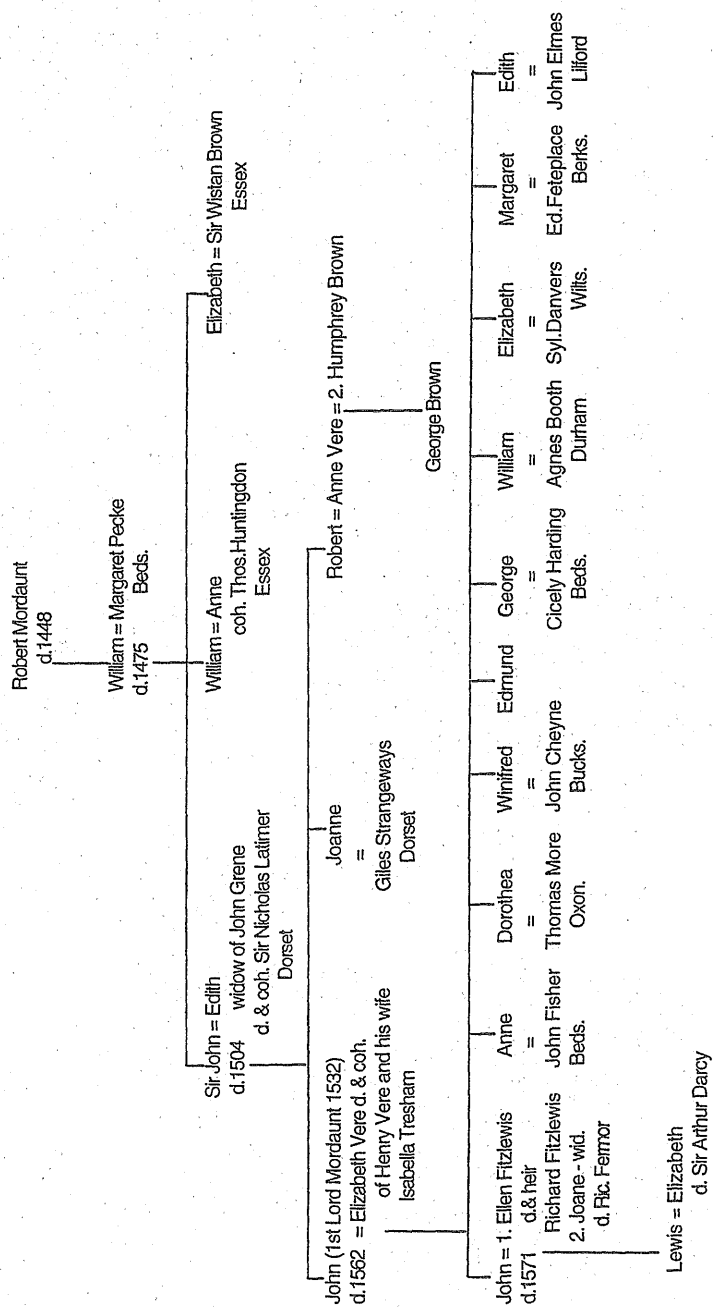
Each of the following pedigrees is compiled from a variety of sources to show the most likely family tree.

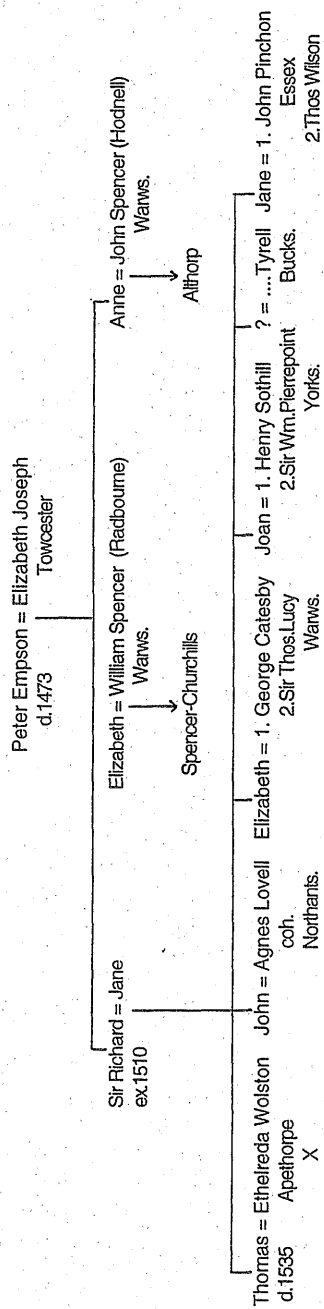
Northamptonshire places of origin are given by township, others by county only.

Abbreviations:-

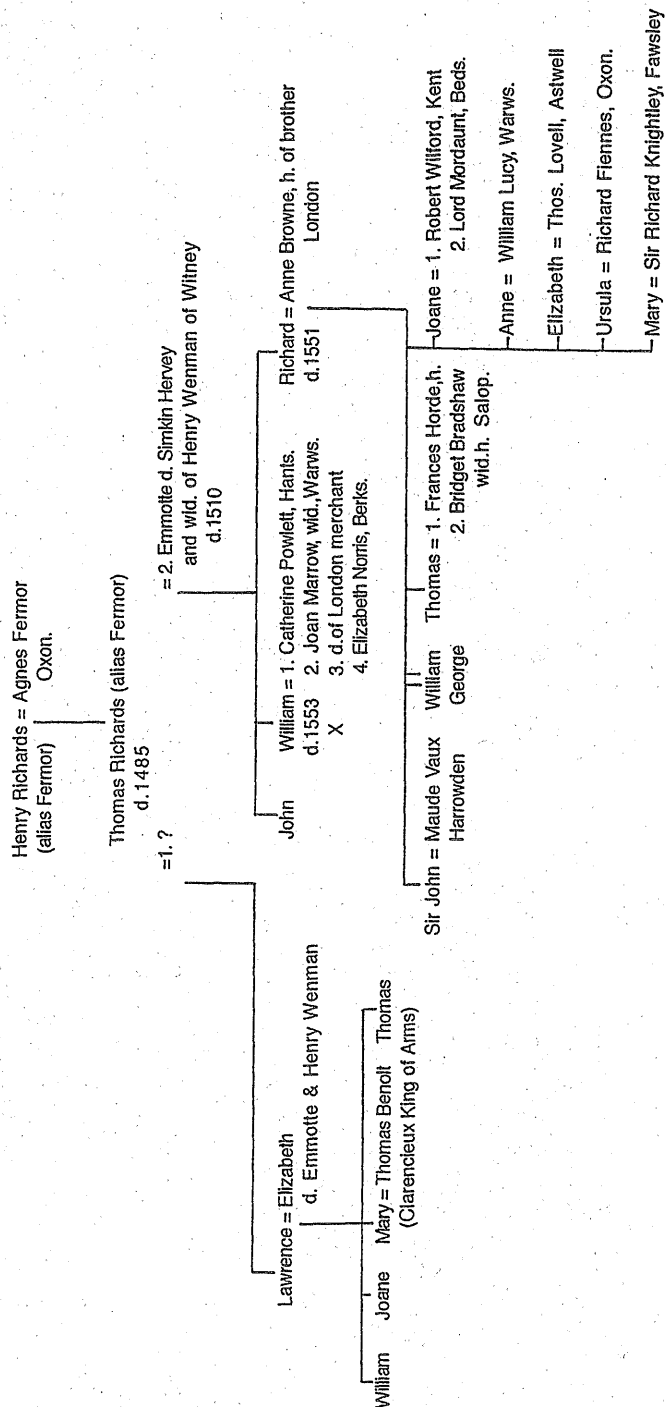
x	=	line died out
h	=	heir/heiress
coh	=	co-heiress
d/dau	=	daughter

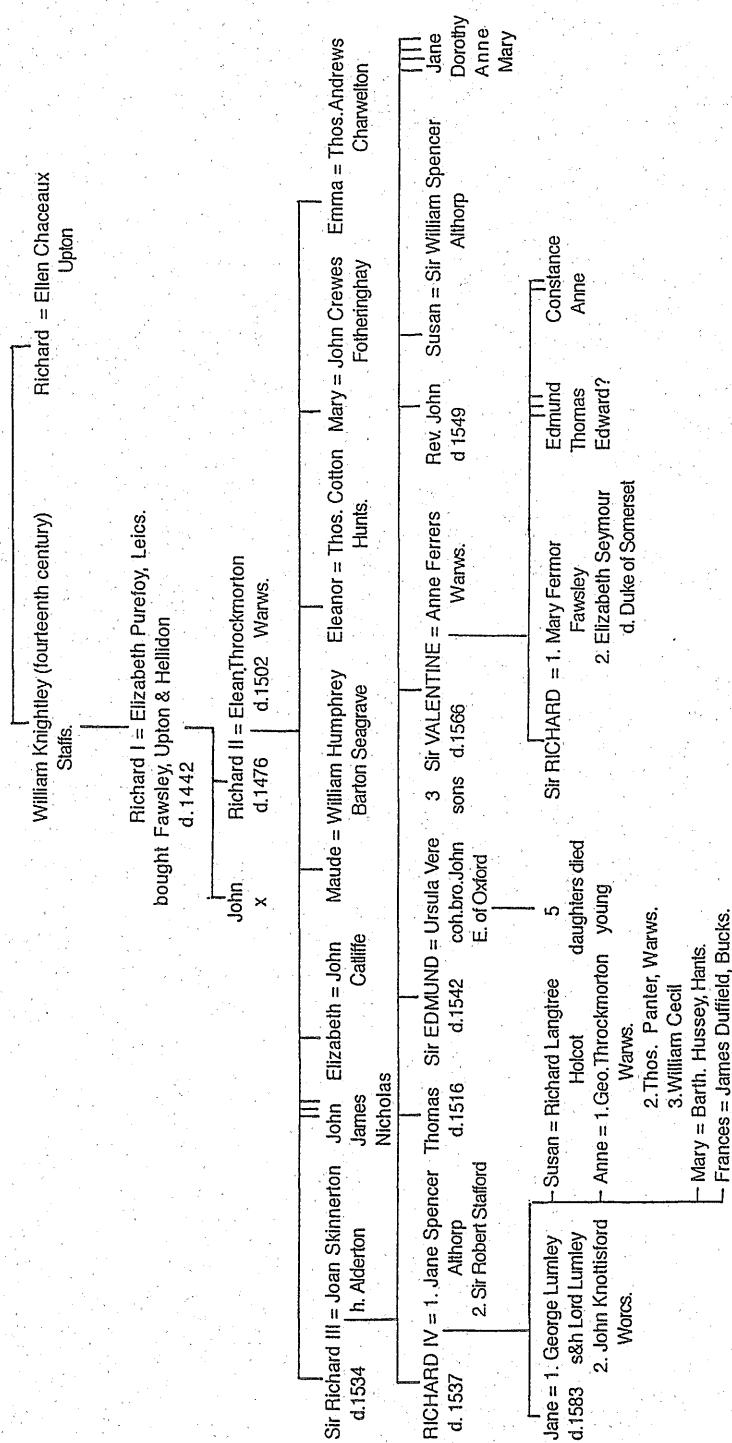


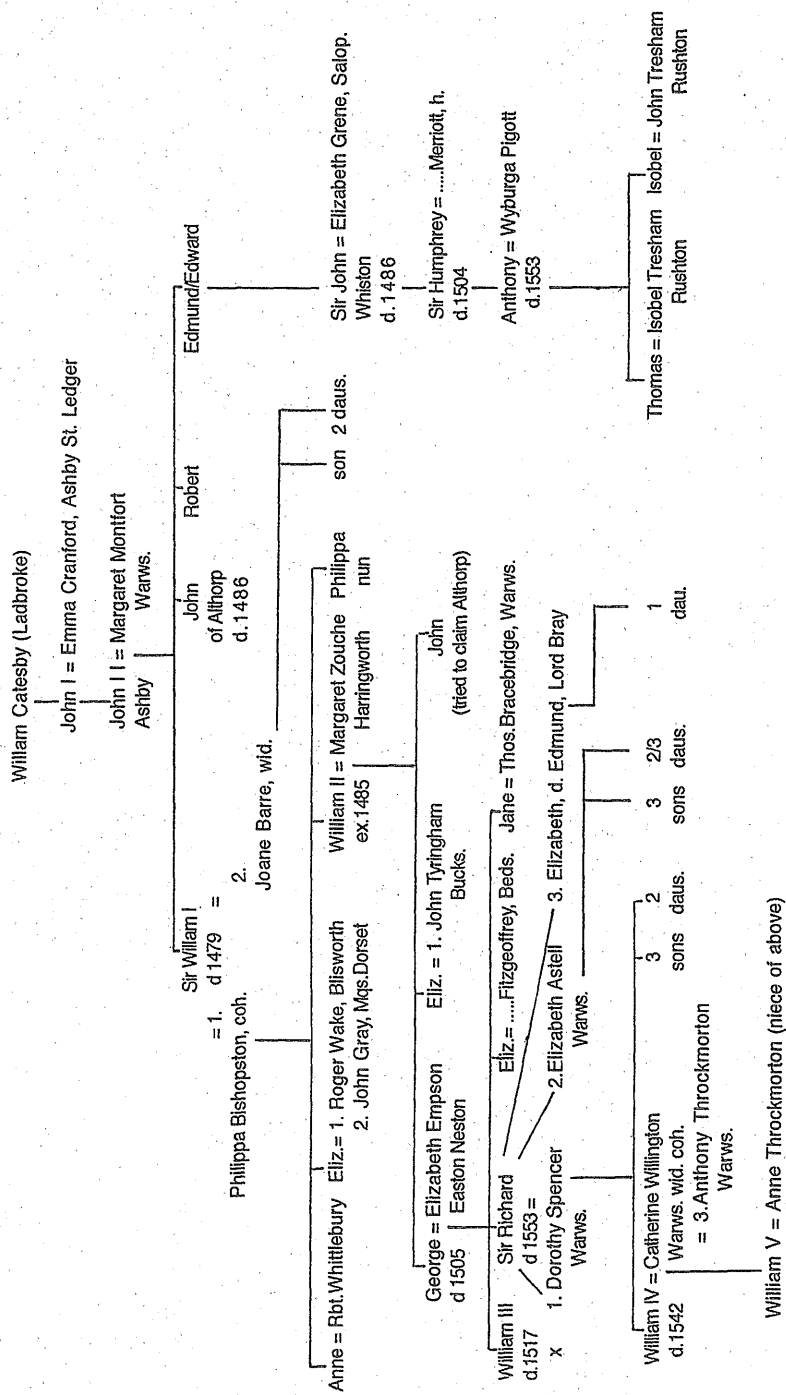


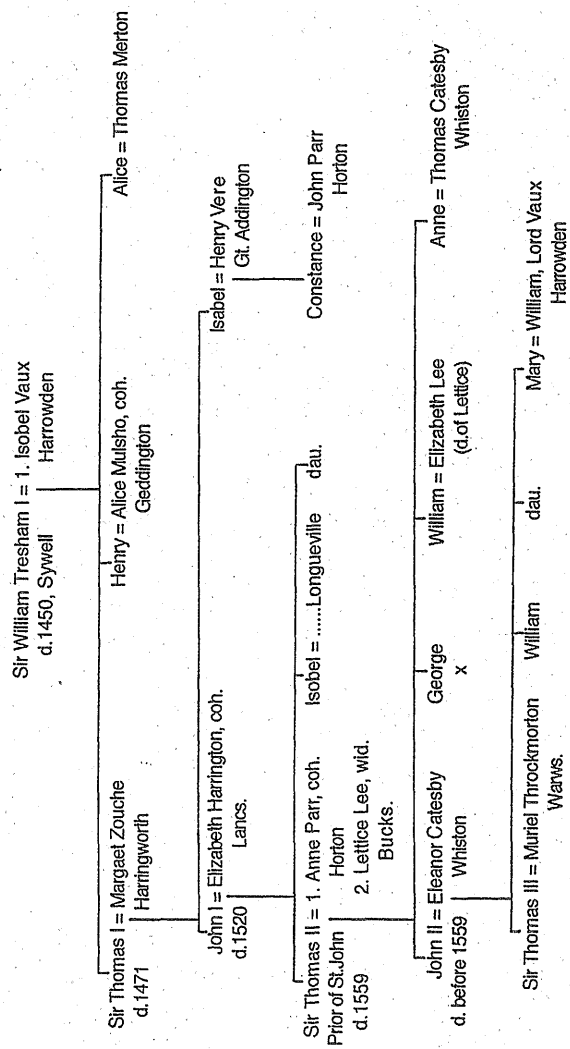


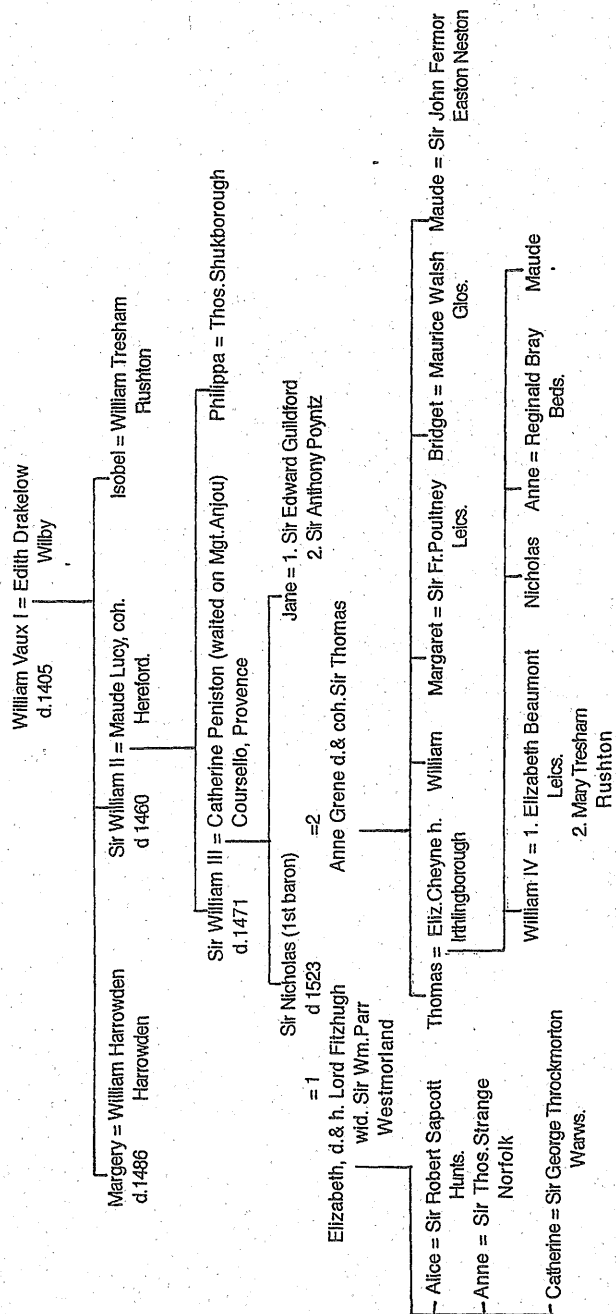


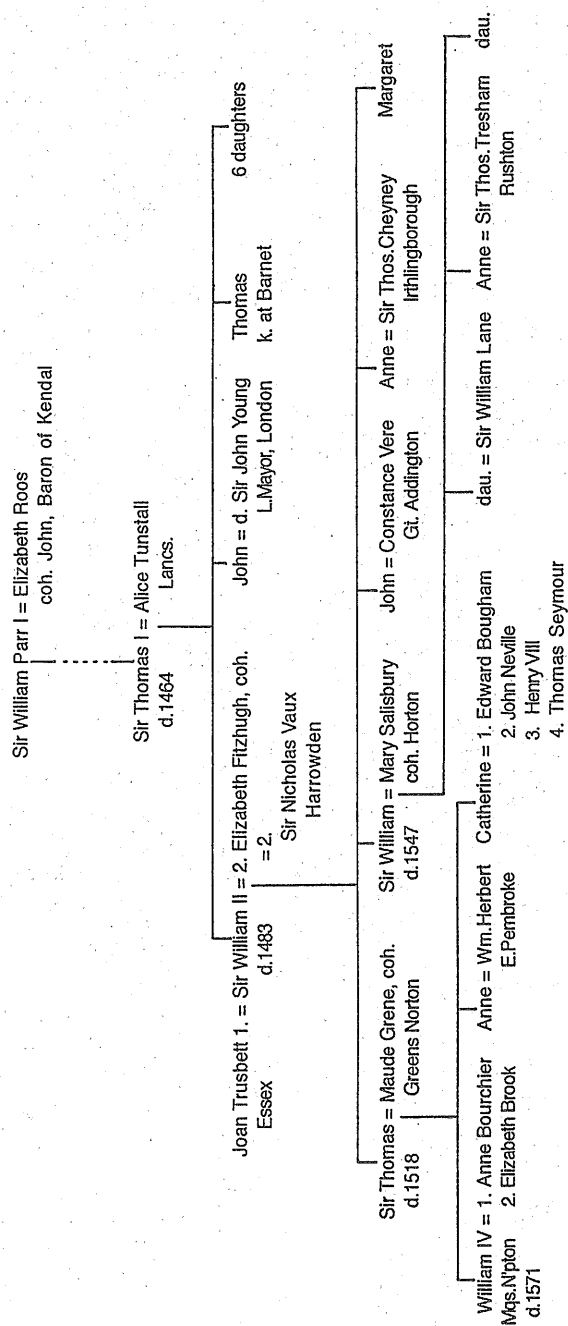




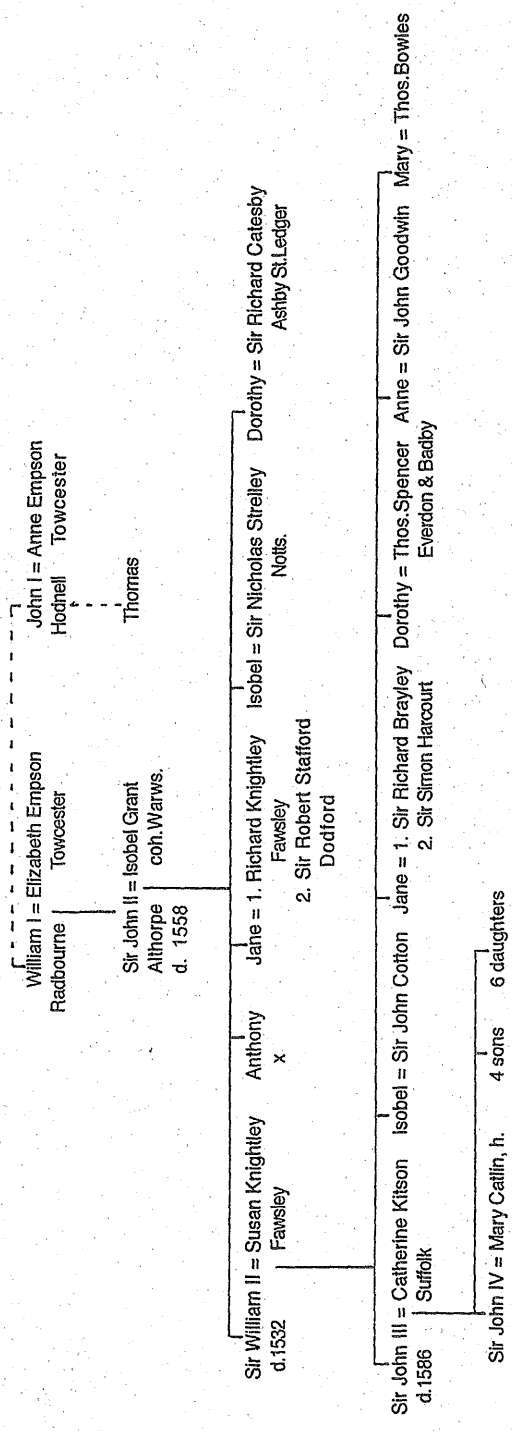








SPENCER FAMILY PEDIGREE



## APPENDIX 3

## MARRIAGES

(arranged by family and generation)  
 wid. = widow, h. = heiress, coh. = coheiress

Name	Spouse	Home Co.		Neigh.Co.		Distant Co.	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
GRENE							
Henry	Catherine Drayton, h.	*					
Amabilia	Ralph Reynes			*			
Margaret	William Zouche		*				
Thomas (Norton)	..... Mablethorpe, h.					*	
Thomas	Mary Talbot					*	
Thomas	Philippa Chertley					*	
Thomas	Maude Throckmorton			*			
Thomas	Marina Beler, coh.			*			
Thomas	Jane Fogge					*	
Anne	Nicholas Vaux		*				
Maude	Thomas Parr		*				
Henry (Drayton)	Maude Mauduit					*	
John	Mary Grene					*	
Henry	Constance Powlitt					*	
	Margaret Roos					*	
Margery	Henry Huddleston		*				
Isobel	Richard Vere		*				
Constance	John Stafford						*
Elizabeth Huddleston	Thomas Cheyne		*				
Henry Vere	Isobel Tresham	*					
Edward Stafford	Margaret Lisle					*	
Elizabeth Vere	John Mordaunt			*			
Anne Vere	Robert Mordaunt			*			
Constance Vere	John Parr		*				
Audrey Vere	John Browne			*			
		2 : 7		2 : 4		9 : 1	
MORDAUNT							
William	Margaret Pecke	*					
John	Edith Latimer, wid., coh.					*	
William	Anne Huntingdon, coh.					*	
Elizabeth	Wistan Browne						*
John	Elizabeth Vere, coh.			*			
Joanne	Giles Strangeways					*	
Robert	Anne Vere, coh.			*			
John	Ellen Fitzlewis, h.					*	
	Joane Fermor, wid.		*				
Anne	John Fisher	*					
Dorothea	Thomas More					*	
Winifred	John Cheyne			*			
George	Cicely Harding, h.	*					
William	Agnes Booth, h.					*	
Elizabeth	Sylvester Danvers						*
Margaret	Edmund Feteplace						*
Edith	John Elmes						*
Lewis	Elizabeth Darcy					*	
		3 : 1		2 : 1		5 : 6	



## Appendix 3

Name	Spouse	Home Co.		Neigh. Co.		Distant Co.	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
EMPSON							
Peter	Elizabeth Joseph, coh.	*					
Richard	Jane	*					
Elizabeth	William Spencer				*		
Anne	John Spencer				*		
Thomas	Ethelreda Wolston, h.	*					
John	Agnes Lovell	*					
Elizabeth	George Catesby		*				
	Thomas Lucy				*		
Joan	William Pierrepont						*
?	..... Tyrell				*		
Jane	John Pinchon						*
		4 : 1		0 : 4		0 : 2	
FERMOR							
Agnes	Henry Richards						*
Thomas	Emmotte Hervey, wid., h.		*				
Lawrence	Elizabeth Wenman	*					
William	Catherine Powlett						*
	Joan ..... wid.						*
	? wid.						*
	Elizabeth Norris						*
Richard	Anne Browne, h.						*
John	Maude Vaux		*				
Thomas	Frances Horde, h.					*	
	Bridget Bradshaw, wid., h.					*	
Joane	Robert Wilford						*
	John Mordaunt		*				
Anne	William Lucy				*		
Elizabeth	Thomas Lovell		*				
Ursula	Richard Fiennes				*		
Mary	Richard Knightley		*				
		1 : 5		0 : 2		6 : 3	
KNIGHTLEY							
Richard	Eleanor Throckmorton				*		
Richard	Joan Skinerton, h.	*					
Maude	William Humphrey		*				
Eleanor	Thomas Cotton				*		
Mary	John Crewe		*				
Emma	Thomas Andrews		*				
Richard	Jane Spencer	*					
Edmund	Ursula Vere					*	
Valentine	Anne Ferrers				*		
Susan	William Spencer		*				
Jane	George Lumley						*
	John Knottesford						*
Susan	Richard Langtree		*				
Anne	George Throckmorton				*		
Mary	Bartholomew Hussey						*

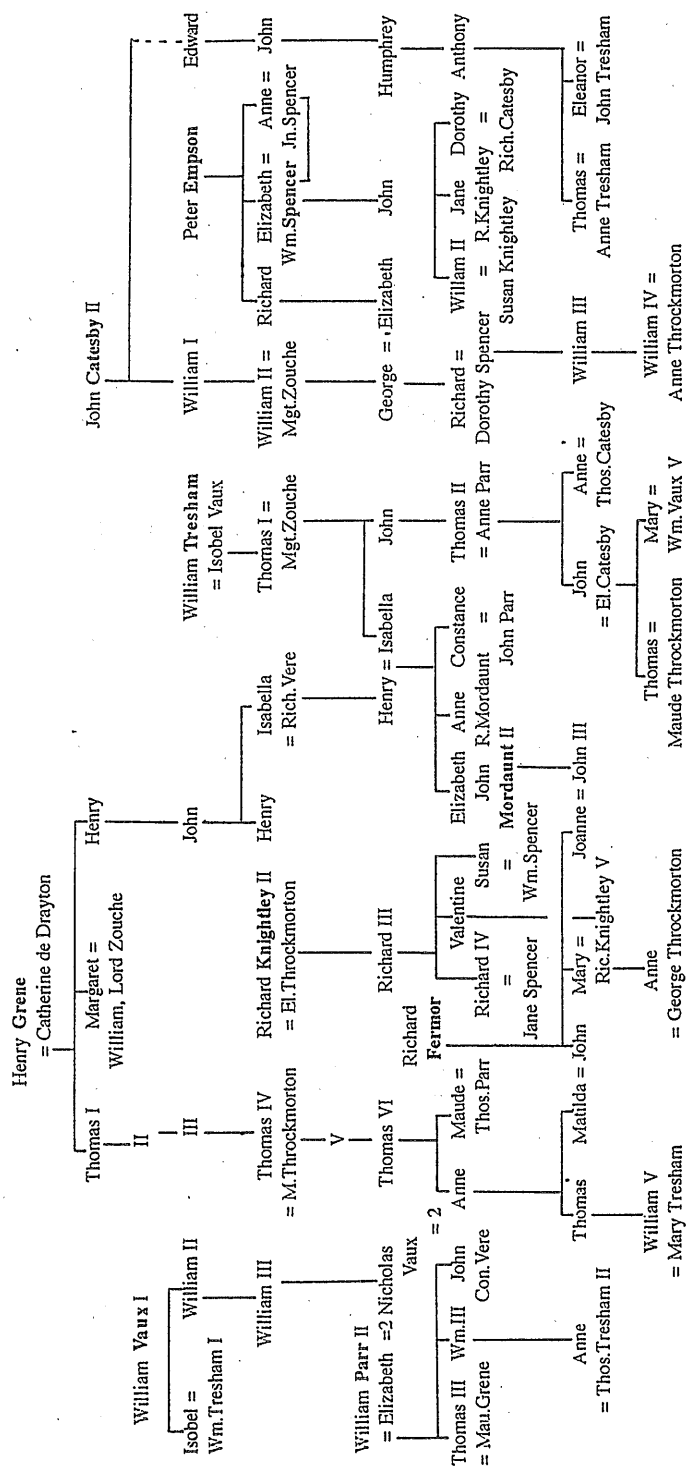
## Appendix 3

Name	Spouse	Home Co.	Neigh.Co.	Distant Co.
KNIGHTLEY cont.		M F	M F	M F
Frances	James Duffield		*	
Richard	Mary Fermor	*		
	Elizabeth Seymour			*
		3 : 5	2 : 3	2 : 3
CATESBY				
William (Ashby)	Philippa Bishopstone		*	
Elizabeth	Roger Wake	*		
	John Gray			*
William	Margaret Zouche	*		
John	Agnes Lytton			*
George	Elizabeth Empson	*		
Richard	Dorothy Spencer	*		
	Elizabeth Astill		*	
	Elizabeth Bray			*
Elizabeth	..... Fitzgeoffrey		*	
Jane	Thomas Bracebridge		*	
William	Catherine Willington, coh.		*	
William	Anne Throckmorton		*	
John (Whiston)	Elizabeth Grene			*
Thomas	Isobel Tresham	*		
Eleanor	John Tresham	*		
		4 : 2	4 : 2	3 : 1
TRESHAM				
William	Isobel Vaux	*		
Thomas	Margaret Zouche	*		
Henry	Alice Mulsho	*		
John	Elizabeth Harrington, coh.			*
Isobel	Henry Vere	*	*	
Thomas	Anne Parr, coh.	*		
	Lettice Lee, wid.		*	
John	Eleanor Catesby	*		
Anne	Thomas Catesby	*		
Thomas	Muriel Throckmorton		*	
Mary	William Vaux	*		
		5 : 3	2 : 0	1 : 0
VAUX				
William	Maude Lucy, coh.			*
Isobel	William Tresham	*		
Margery	William Harrowden	*		
William	Catherine Peniston			*
Nicholas	Elizabeth Fitzhugh, wid., h.			*
	Anne Grene, coh.	*		
Jane	Anthony Poyntz			*
Alice	Richard Sappcott			*
Anne	Thomas Strange			*
Catherine	George Throckmorton		*	
Thomas	Elizabeth Cheyne	*		
Margaret	Francis Poultney		*	

## Appendix 3

Name	Spouse	Home Co.		Neigh.Co.		Distant Co.	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
VAUX cont.							
Bridget	Maurice Walsh						*
Maude	John Fernor		*				
William	Elizabeth Beaumont			*			
	Mary Tresham	*					
Anne	Reginald Bray				*		
		3 : 3		1 : 3		3 : 4	
PARR							
William	Joan Trusbett						*
	Elizabeth Fitzhugh, h.						*
John	..... Young						*
Thomas	Maude Grene, coh.	*					
William	Mary Salisbury, coh.	*					
John	Constance Vere, coh.	*					
Anne	Thomas Cheyne		*				
William	Anne Bouchier						*
	Elizabeth Brook						*
Anne	William Herbert						*
Catherine	Edward Bougham						*
	John Neville						*
	Henry Tudor						*
?	William Lane		*				
Anne	Thomas Tresham		*				
		3 : 3				5 : 4	
SPENCER							
William(Radbourne)	Elizabeth Empson				*		
John(Hodnell)	Anne Empson				*		
John	Isobel Grant, coh.	*					
William(Althorp)	Susan Knightley	*					
Jane	Richard Knightley		*				
Isobel	Nicholas Strelley				*		
Dorothy	Richard Catesby		*				
John	Catherine Kitson						*
Jane	Simon Harcourt				*		
Dorothy	Thomas Spencer		*				
John	Mary Catlin, h.						*
		2 : 3		2 : 2		2 : 0	
		30 : 33		15 : 21		36 : 24	
		(63)		(36)		51 : 45 (60)	
Overall total				159			

## FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS



## APPENDIX 5

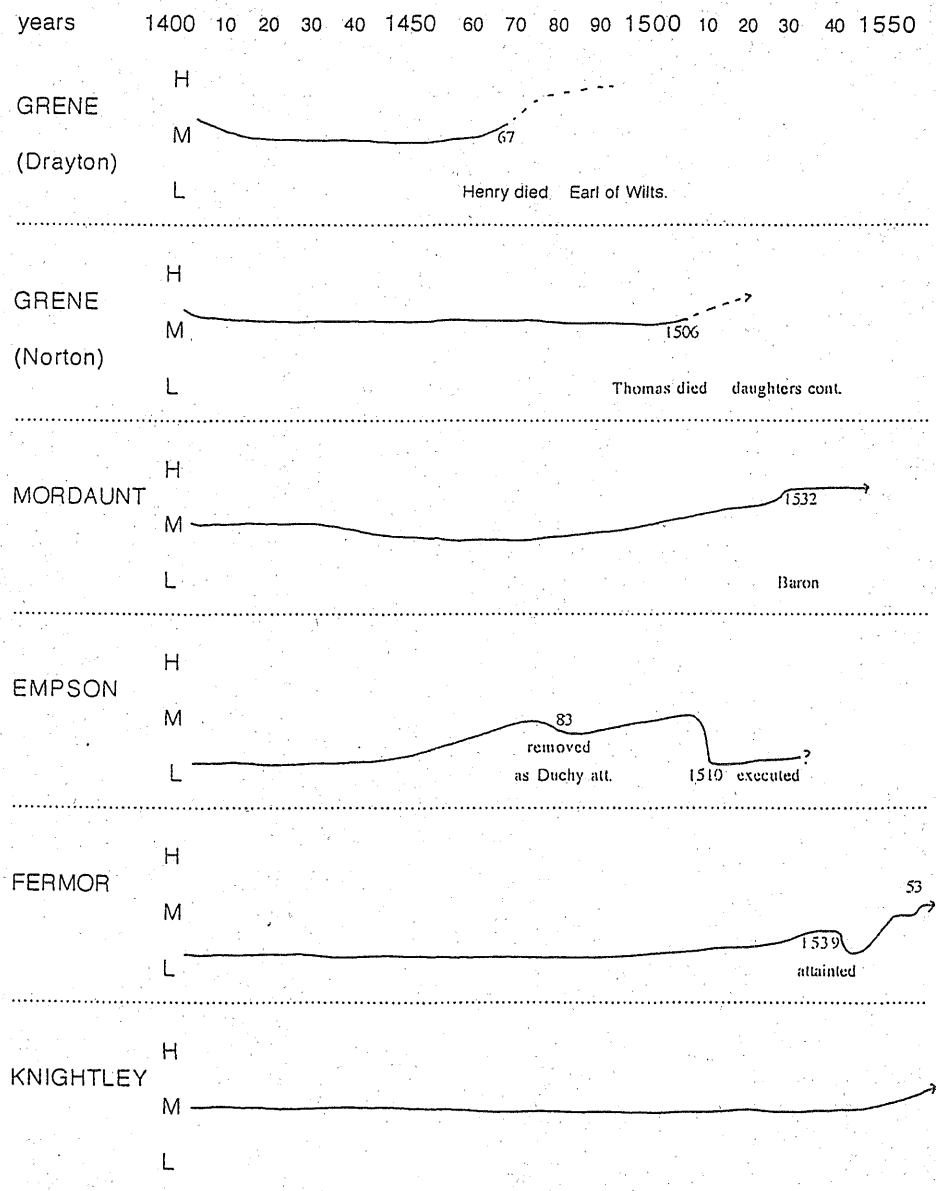
## WILLS

Name	date	NRO	PRO	other
GRENE etc.				
John Grene	1432	SS4238		
Henry Grene	1467	SS3421		
John Stafford	1473	SS3967		
Constance Stafford	1475	Early Wills f19R		
Margaret Grene	1475	Early Wills f18V		
Edward Stafford	1498	SS4015		
MORDAUNT				
Henry Vere	1493		27 Dogett	
John Mordaunt	1504		22 Holgrave	Halstead p. 593
Nicholas Latymer	1505		29 Holgrave	
John Mordaunt	1562			Halstead pp. 519-23
FERMOR				
Henry Richard (alias Fermere)	1467		22 Godyn	Oxfordshire Wills <sup>1</sup>
Thomas Ricardis (.. Fermour)	1485		19 Logge	Oxfordshire Wills
Emotte Fermor	1501		22 Moone	Oxfordshire Wills
KNIGHTLEY				
Richard Knightley	1534	Book E 118 <sup>2</sup>	23 Hogen	
Richard Knightley	1540		8 Alenger	
Joan Knightley	1541	Book G vol.2 128		
Ursula Knightley	1558		1 Welles	
Valentine Knightley	1566	YZ5545		
CATESBY				
William Catesby	1485		15 Logge	
John Catesby ( Althorp)	1486		27 Logge	
John Catesby (Whiston)	1486		1 Miller	
Humphrey Catesby (Whiston)	1504		23 Holgrave	
George Catesby	1505		6 Adeane	
Richard Catesby	1553	NPL 1032	19 Tasche	
Anthony Catesby	1553	Book L 77-78		
TRESHAM				
John Tresham	1520	Book B 22-26		
Lettice Tresham	1558		28 Noodes	
Thomas Tresham	1559		19 Chanay	
SPENCER				
John Spencer (Hodnell)	1496		4 Home	
John Spencer	1522		24 Maynwaryng	
William Spencer	1532		16 Thower	
VAUX				
Nicholas Vaux	1523		11 Redfelde	
Thomas Vaux	1536		36 Hogen	
PARR				
Thomas Parr (Kendal)	1513		32 Alenger	
William Parr (Horton)	1548		6 Populwell	

<sup>1</sup> Some Oxfordshire Wills 1393-1510, ed. J. Weaver & A. Bearwood (Oxfordshire Record Society vol XXXIX, 1958).

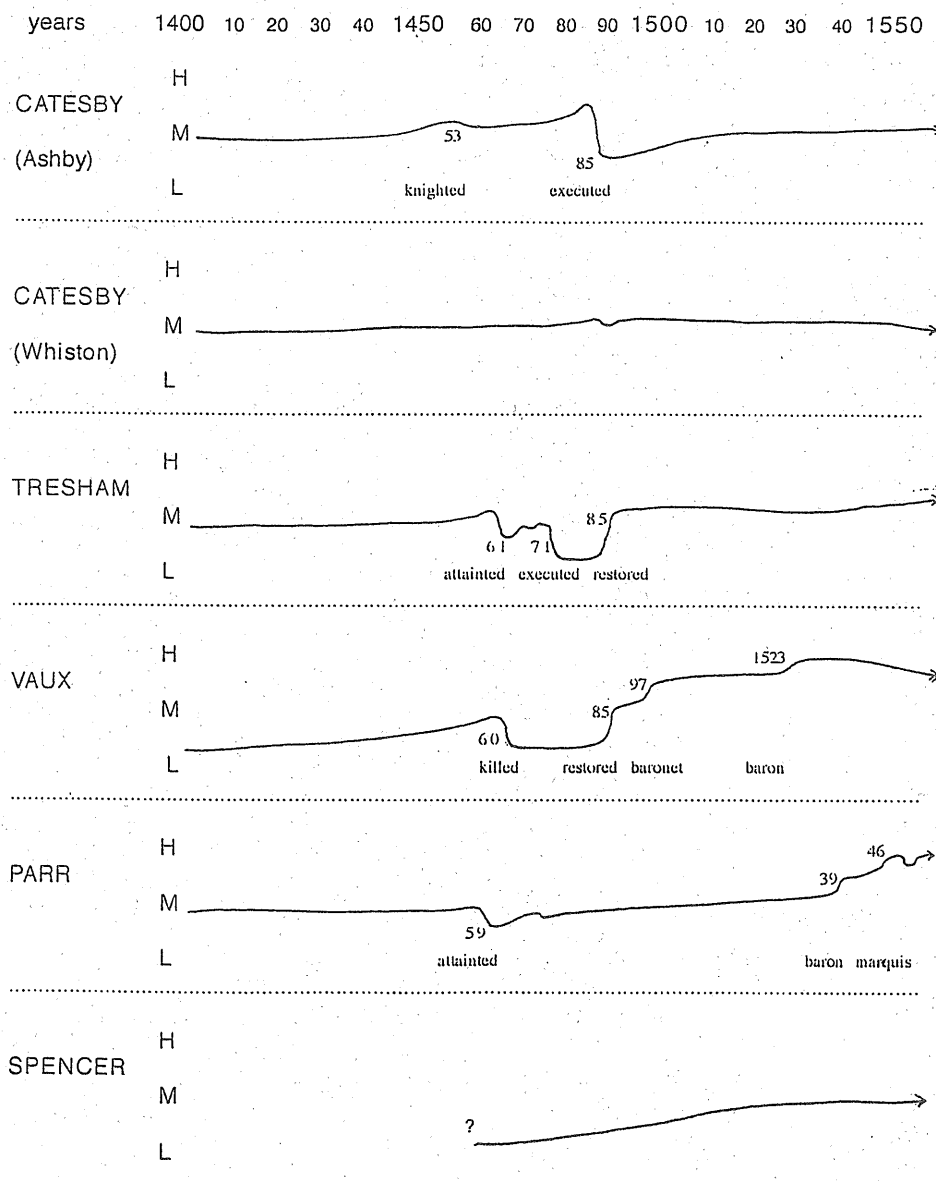
<sup>2</sup> NRO, Northamptonshire & Rutland Wills.

# APPENDIX 6a TIMING OF FAMILY FORTUNES



H = high, M = medium, L = low - very approximate status

## Appendix 6b



APPENDIX 7 NORTHAMPTONSHIRE GENTRY 1460-1560<sup>1</sup>

Surname <sup>2</sup>	forename	rank	home	Sheriff		MP		JP		other positions
				N	O	N	O	N	O <sup>3</sup>	
Andrews	Thomas		Charwelton	*						
Andrews	Thomas	knt	Charwelton	*		*				
Billing	Thomas	knt	Astwell	*				*	*	Serj'nt-at-Law, Chief Justice.
Brudenell	Thomas		Deene	*				*		
Burton	Richard			*						
Catesby	William	knt	Ashby	*	*	*	*	*	*	Sq.Body & H'sehold.
Catesby	William		Ashby	*		*		*	*	Sq.Bd;Ch/Cham. Exch.
Catesby	Richard	knt	Ashby	*		*				
Catesby	John		Althorp	*						
Catesby	John	knt	Whiston					*		Sjt.Law;J.Com.Pleas.
Catesby	Humphrey		Whiston					*		
Catesby	Anthony		Whiston	*						
Catesby	Thomas		Whiston	*						
Cave	Richard		Stanford	*						
Cave	Thomas		Stanford					*		
Chauncey	William		Edgecote			*				
Clarke	John	knt		*						
Cope	John		Canons Ashby	*						
Cycill	David			*						
Danvers	John			*				*		
Danvers	Robert							*		
Downhall	William			*						
Dyve	John		Harleston			*				Attorney Gen.to Q.Eliz.
Dyve	John		Harleston	*				*		
Empson	Richard	knt	Easton Neston			*		*		Att.Gen/Chanc.Duchy
Fermor	Richard		Easton							Steward of Earl Derby.
Fermor	John	knt	Easton	*		*		*		
Grene	Thomas	knt	Norton	*		*				
Grene	Thomas	knt	Norton	*						
Grene	Henry		Drayton	*		*	*	*	*	
Griffin	Nicholas		Braybrooke	*						
Griffin	Richard		Braybrooke	*				*		
Griffin	Thomas	knt	Braybrooke	*				*		
Griffin	Thomas		Braybrooke			*				
Griffin	Edward		Braybrooke					*		
Hasilwood	Thomas			*				*		
Hastings	Ralph		Harrowden	*		*		*		Sq/Knt.Body, Const.N'pton.
Hertwell	William			*				*		
Huddleston	Henry			*				*		
Hulcote	John		Bradden	*		*		*		Royal H'hold, Sq.Body.
Kirkham	Robert	knt				*				
Knightley	Richard	knt	Fawsley	*				*		
Knightley	Richard	knt	Fawsley			*		*		Gent.Usher Extra.
Knightley	Edmund	knt	Fawsley			*		*		Sjt.Law, Att.Gen.Duch.
Knightley	Valentine	knt	Fawsley	*						
Knyvet	John	knt	Horton	*						

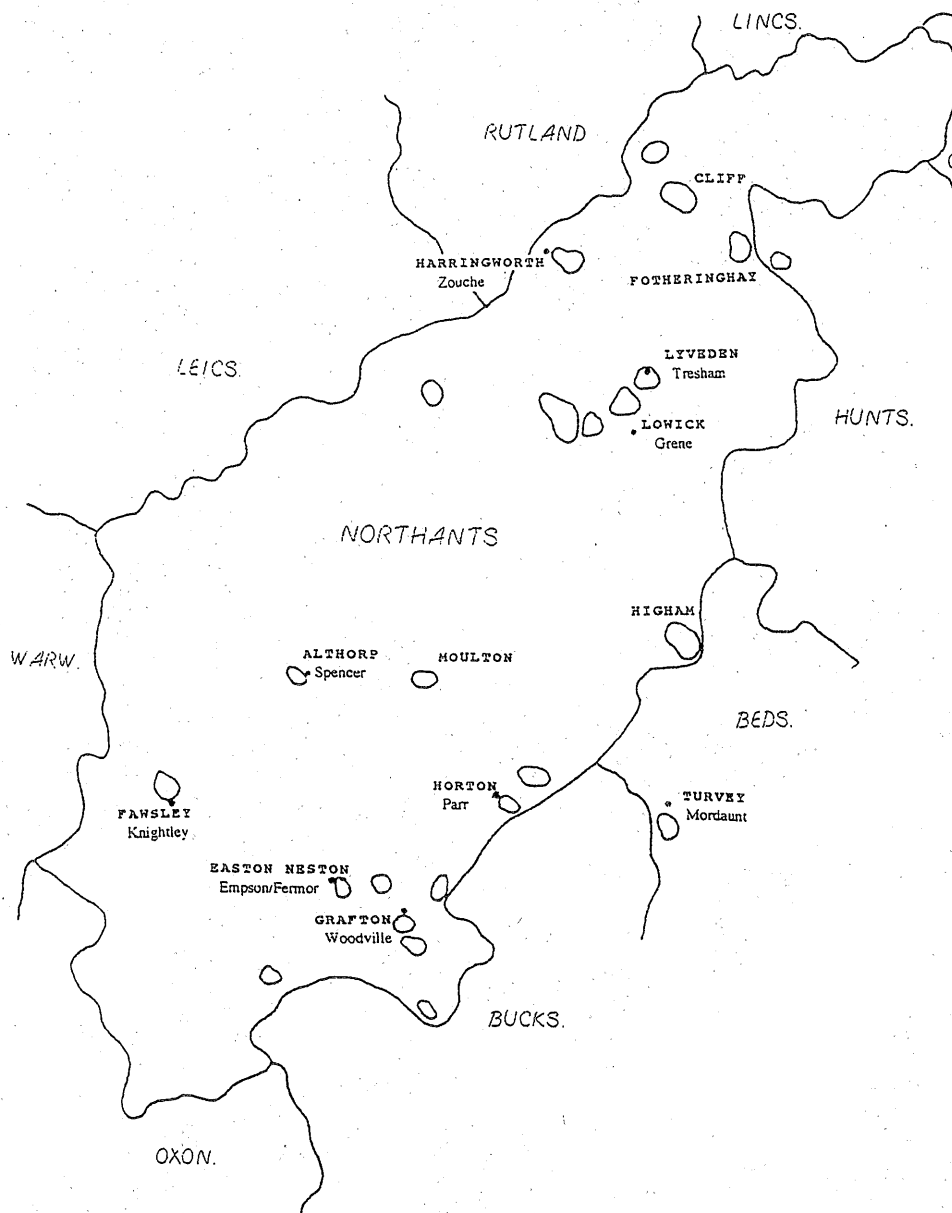
<sup>1</sup> From a variety of sources. Bold type - families studied.<sup>2</sup> Arranged chronologically in families.<sup>3</sup> N = Northamptonshire; O = other county



## Appendix 7

Surname	forename	rank	home	Sheriff		MP		JP		other positions
				N	O	N	O	N	O	
Lane	Ralph		Horton	*						
Lane	Robert		Horton			*				
Lane	John		Horton					*		
Longueville	John	knt	Billing					*		
Lovell	Thomas			*						
Lovet	Thomas		Astwell	*						
Lovet	Thomas		Astwell	*				*		
Lucy	Thomas	knt		*				*		
Mathew	Robert			*						
Mauntell	Walter		Neth.Heyford	*				*		
Mauntell	Walter	knt	Neth.Heyford	*				*		
Middleton	Richard		Greens Norton			*		*		King's Squire.
Mildmay	Walter	knt?	Apethorpe			*				
Montagu	Edward		Boughton	*						King's Sjt.,Chief Justice.
Mordaunt	John	knt	Turvey			*	*	*		King's Sjt.,Chanc.Duchy.
Mordaunt	John	bar	Drayton	*		*	*	*	*	Privy Council.
Mulsho	Thomas		Geddington			*				servant of Duke of York.
Mulsho	John		Geddington	*						
Newnham	William		Everdon	*						
Newnham	William	knt	Everdon	*		*	*	*		
Parr	Thomas	knt		*						Compt. H'hold Hen VIII.
Parr	William	marq								Lord.Lieut of 5 counties.
Parr	William	bar	Horton	*		*		*		Knt.B,Kpr.Rock'ham C.
Pemberton	Robert			*		*		*		Usher Chamber.
Philip	David	knt	Thornhaugh	*	*	*		*	*	Sq.Body, Kpr.Windsor Park.
Salisbury	Roger			*				*		
Spencer	John	knt	Hodnell	*						
Spencer	William	knt	Althorp	*						
Spencer	John	knt	Althorp	*		*		*		
Stafford	Humphrey		Kirby	*				*		
Stafford	John	earl	Drayton					*		
Stafford	Edward	earl	Drayton							
Thorp	Thomas	knt?	Barnwell			*	*	*		Chanc.Exchequer.
Throckmorton	Nicholas	knt	Paulerspury			*	*	*		Sewer to Q.Catherine Parr.
Tresham	William	knt	Sywell			*		*	*	Chanc.Duchy.
Tresham	Thomas	knt	Rushton	*	*	*	*	*	*	
Tresham	John		Rushton	*						
Tresham	Thomas	knt	Rushton	*	*	*		*		Sq.Bod;Gr Prior St.John.
Tresham	George		Rushton	*		*		*		
Vaux	William		Harrowden	*	*	*		*		
Vaux	Nicholas	bar	Harrowden	*		*		*		Knt.Bod, Lieut.Guisnes.
Vere	Henry			*				*		
Wake	Thomas		Blisworth	*				*		
Williams	Henry		Alderton			*				
Whittlebury	Robert			*						
Wolston	Guy	knt	Apethorp	*		*		*		Sq.Body, Const.Fotheringhay.
Woodhull	Fulk			*						
Woodhull	Nicholas			*						
Woodville	Richard	bar	Grafton	*				*		
Zouche	William	bar	Harringworth			*		*		
Zouche	William	bar	Harringworth	*						

## APPENDIX 8

MAP OF DEER PARKS IN NORTHAMPTONSHIRE<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup> Based on the map of Christopher Saxton 1576.

## APPENDIX 9 LIST OF SHERIFFS OF NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

## HENRY IV

1399	Nicholas Bradeshagh and John Warwick	1439	Eustace Burnaby	1484	Roger Wake
1400	John Cope	1440	John Holland	1485	Richard Burton
1401	John Chetwood	1441	<b>Thomas Grene</b>		
1402	Ralph Parles and Giles Mallory	1442	<b>William Catesby</b>		
1403	Warin Lucien	1443	John Merbury		
1404	John Cope and <b>Ralph Grene</b>	1444	<b>Henry Grene</b>	1485	Henry Vere
1405	<b>Ralph Grene</b>	1445	Walter Mauntell	1486	<b>Richard Knightley</b>
1406	Thomas Woodville	1446	Thomas Wake	1487	Guy Wolston
1407	<b>Ralph Grene</b>	1447	John Holland	1488	David Philip
1408	Ralph Parles	1448	Eustace Burnaby	1489	Thomas Hasilwood
1409	Thomas Mulsho	1449	<b>William Vaux</b>	1490	Thomas Lovet
1410	Thomas Mulsho	1450	Thomas Wake	1491	Guy Wolston
1411	John Chetwood	1451	<b>William Catesby</b>	1492	Robert Whittlebury
1412	Matthew Swetenham	1452	Nicholas Griffin	1493	<b>Richard [?] Vaux</b>
		1453	<b>William Vaux</b>	1494	John Danvers
		1454	<b>Thomas Grene</b>	1495	John Dyve
		1455	<b>William Catesby</b>	1496	Nicholas Griffin
		1456	Nicholas Griffin	1497	William Zouche
		1457	<b>Thomas Grene</b>	1498	<b>Humphrey Catesby</b>
		1458	Walter Mauntell	1499	Richard Burton
		1460		1500	Fulk Woodhull

## HENRY V

1413	Thomas Wake and Ralph Parles			1501	Thomas Andrews
1414	<b>Ralph Grene</b>			1502	<b>Thomas Vaux</b>
1415	Thomas Woodville			1503	John Dyve
1416	<b>Thomas Grene</b>	1461	William Fairfax	1504	Nicholas Griffin
1417	John Mauntell	1462	Thomas Wake	1505	Thomas Lovet
1418	Thomas Wake	1463	Thomas Wake	1506	<b>John Tresham</b>
1419	John Pilkington	1464	Walter Mauntell	1507	<b>Richard Knightley</b>
1420	Thomas Woodville	1465	<b>Henry Grene</b>	1508	Thomas Mulsho
1421	Thomas Woodville	1466	Henry Huddleston		

## HENRY VI

1422	Thomas Woodville	1467	Ralph Hastings		
1423	John Holland	1468	Roger Salisbury		
1424	<b>John Catesby</b>	1469	Guy Wolston	1509	<b>Thomas Parr</b>
1425	John Wakerly	1470	William Newnham	1510	<b>Richard Knightley</b>
1426	Thomas Chambre	1471	Ralph Hastings	1511	<b>John Spencer</b>
1427	John Knyvet	1472	John Hulcote	1512	Ralph Lane
1428	Thomas Woodville	1473	Henry Huddleston	1513	<b>John Catesby</b>
1429	George Longueville	1474	Richard Griffin	1514	Robert Mathew
1430	William Braunspeith	1475	<b>Richard Knightley</b>	1516	<b>Nicholas Vaux</b>
1431	John Culpepper	1476	Roger Salisbury	1517	<b>William Parr</b>
1432	Thomas Chambre	1477	William Downhall	1518	William Gascoigne
1433	Thomas Woodville	1478	<b>William Catesby</b>	1519	Thomas Lucy
1434	Thomas Wake	1479	William Newnham	1520	John Mulsho
1435	John Holland	1480	Robert Pemberton	1521	<b>William Parr</b>
1436	<b>William Vaux</b>	1481	Thomas Lovet	1522	John Clarke
1437	Richard Woodville	1482	Robert Whittlebury	1523	Wm. Fitz-Williams
1438	Thomas Chambre			1524	<b>Thomas Tresham</b>

## RICHARD III

1483	Robert Whittlebury	1525	Walter Mauntell
		1526	Humphrey Stafford
		1527	Nicholas Woodhull

## Appendix 9

1528	Wm. Fitz-Williams	1542	<b>Richard Catesby</b>	MARY
1529	John Cave	1543	Thoas Brudenell	
1530	Richard Cave	1544	Thomas Griffin	1553 Thomas Cave
1531	<b>William Spencer</b> and David Cycill	1545	John Cope	1554 <b>Valentine Knightley</b>
1532	David Cycill	1546	Thomas Cave	1555 <b>Thomas Tresham</b>
1533	<b>William Parr</b>			1556 Thomas Andrews
1534	Thomas Griffin		EDWARD VI	1557 <b>John Fermor</b>
1535	John Clarke	1547	Humphrey Stafford	1558 <b>John Spencer</b>
1536	William Newnham	1548	<b>Thomas Tresham</b>	
1537	<b>William Parr</b>	1549	Thomas Andrews	ELIZABETH
1538	<b>Anthony Catesby</b>	1550	<b>Richard Catesby</b>	1558 <b>John Spencer</b>
1539	<b>Thomas Tresham</b>	1551	<b>John Spencer</b>	1559 Edward Montagu
1540	William Newnham	1552	Thomas Lovell	1560 Thomas Lovet
1541	Robert Kirkhan			1561 <b>Thomas Spencer</b>
				1562 <b>Thomas Catesby</b>

## APPENDIX 9a

COMMISSIONS OF THE PEACE<sup>1</sup>For the years 1452-1467 - fourteen commissions were appointed<sup>2</sup>

Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Edward, Earl of March					*									
John, Bishop of Lincoln		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
John, Duke of Norfolk						*	*	*						
Richard, Earl of Warwick	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Edward, Earl of Kent	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Richard, Duke of York	*	*	*	*	*									
Humphrey, Duke of Bucks	*	*	*	*	*									
Sir Leo de Wellys	*	*	*	*	*									
Sir William Zouche	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sir William Lovell	*													
Sir Ralph Cromwell	*													
Sir Richard Woodville	*	*	*	*	*				*	*	*	*	*	*
Sir Peter Arden	*	*	*	*	*	*								
<b>Sir Thomas Grene</b>	*	*												
Sir William Lucy	*	*	*	*										
<b>Sir William Catesby</b>	*	*	*	*					*	*	*			
Sir John Lovell	*			*										
Sir Robert Danby	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sir John Needham							*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sir William Hastings							*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Thomas Billing	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Thomas Thorp	*													
Henry Grene	*	*	*	*					*	*	*	*		
<b>Thomas Tresham</b>	*	*	*	*										*
Thomas Wake	*				*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*
<b>William Vaux</b>	*													
William Mauntell	*					*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Robert Tanfield	*	*	*	*						*	*	*	*	*
Robert Isham	*				*								*	*
Richard Willoughby	*													
John Dyve	*				*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Henry Skinnard	*								*	*	*	*	*	*
Robert Danvers			*	*										
Roger Salisbury					*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Robert Ingleton					*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
John Pilkington						*	*	*	*	*				
John Eltonhead											*	*	*	*
Henry Huddleston											*	*	*	*
Totals	26	16	17	16	15	13	15	15	15	15	18	20	20	21

<sup>1</sup> Taken from *Calendars of Patent Rolls and Letters and Papers of Henry VIII.*<sup>2</sup> 1 - 1454; 2 - 1458; 3 - July 1459; 4 - Dec. 1459; 5 - 1460; 6 - 1459; 7 - 1460; 7 - 1461; 8 - 1461; 9 - 1462; 10 - 1463; 11 - 1464; 12 - 1465; 13 - 1465; 14 - 1466.

## Appendix 9b

For the years 1485-1494 - twelve commissions were appointed.<sup>3</sup>

Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Edward Gray, Earl of Kent	*	*	*	*	*	*						
Richard Woodville, Earl Ryvers			*	*	*	*	*	*	*			
<b>Edward Stafford, Earl of Wilts.</b>					*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sir John Longueville		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>John Tresham</b>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
William Tanfield	*	*	*	*	*	*	*					
William Chaumbre			*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sir James Harrington							*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>John Catesby (Althorp)</b>			*									
<b>Sir John Catesby (Whiston)</b>		*	*									
<b>Sir Thomas Grene</b>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>Sir Nicholas Vaux</b>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>Richard Empson</b>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sir Guy Wolston	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Thomas Hazelwood			*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
David Philip						*		*	*	*	*	*
<b>Humphrey Catesby</b>							*	*	*	*	*	*
Reginald Bray											*	
Thomas Lovell											*	
Henry Vere	*	*		*	*	*	*					
Totals	8	9	12	13	14	15	13	13	14	12	14	12

<sup>3</sup> 1 - Sep 1485; 2 - Nov 1485; 3 - 1486; 4 - Feb 1487; 5 - Aug 1487; 6 - 1488; 7 - Jun 1489; 8 - Jul 1489; 9 - 1490; 10 - 1491; 11 - 1493; 12 - 1494.

## Appendix 9c

For the years 1494-1509 - four commissions were appointed.<sup>4</sup>

Name	1	2	3	4
Marquess of Dorset	*	*	*	*
George Grey, Earl of Kent	*	*	*	*
<b>Edward Stafford, Earl of Wilts</b>	*			
John, Viscount Welles	*			
Sir John Vavasour	*	*	*	*
Arthur, Prince of Wales	*	*		
Henry, Prince of Wales				*
John, Archbishop Canterbury			*	
Henry, Archbishop Canterbury			*	
William, Bishop Lincoln	*	*	*	*
Sir John Fisher	*	*	*	*
<b>Sir Thomas Grene</b>	*	*	*	*
Sir John Longueville	*			
Sir Guy Wolston	*			
Sir James Harrington	*			
Sir David Philip	*	*	*	*
<b>Sir Richard Empson</b>	*	*	*	*
<b>Humphrey Catesby</b>	*			
<b>John Tresham</b>	*	*	*	*
Richard Burton	*		*	*
John Hazelwood	*	*	*	*
John Danvers	*	*	*	*
<b>Sir Nicholas Vaux</b>	*	*	*	
Sir Richard Ormeston	*	*		
Sir William Hertwell				*
Sir Nicholas Griffin			*	*
William Bedyll	*	*	*	
William Marbury	*	*		
Robert Brudenell	*	*	*	
William Cutlard	*	*	*	
Christopher Brown	*	*	*	
William Elmes	*	*	*	
George Dalyson	*	*	*	
Totals	20	21	23	22

<sup>4</sup> 1 - 1496; 2 - 1500; 3 - 1502; 4 - 1504.

## Appendix 9d

For the years 1524 and 1536.

Names for 1524<sup>5</sup>

Thomas, Cardinal of York  
 John, Bishop of Lincoln  
 Thomas, Duke of Norfolk  
 Thomas, Marquess of Dorset  
 Sir John Grey  
 Sir Richard Wingfield  
 Sir Robert Brudenell  
 Sir Humphrey Coningsby  
 William Rudhall  
 Sir William Fitzwilliam sen.  
 Sir William Gascoigne  
 Sir Thomas Lucy  
**Sir William Parr**  
**Edmund Knightley**  
**Richard Knightley**  
 Humphrey Stafford  
 Richard Burton  
 George Kirkham  
**William Spencer**  
 William Mauntell  
 Thomas Brudenell  
 Edward Montagu  
 Edward Newnham  
 Richard Humphrey  
 Thomas Lovett  
 William Saunders  
 Robert Chauntrell  
 Edward Warner

Names for 1536<sup>6</sup>

Sir Thomas Audeley, Chancellor  
 Thomas, Duke of Norfolk  
 Charles, Duke of Suffolk  
 Sir William Fitzwilliam, Lord Admiral  
 John, Bishop of Lincoln  
 John, Lord Zouche  
**John, Lord Mordaunt**  
 Sir Richard Grey  
 Sir Anthony Fitzherbert  
 Sir Walter Luke  
 Sir John Russell sen.  
**Sir William Parr**  
 Sir William Gascoigne  
 Sir Thomas Griffin  
**Sir Thomas Tresham**  
 Sir William Newnham  
 Sir Robert Kirkham  
**Edmund Knightley Sjt-at-Law**  
 Edward Montagu Sjt-at-Law  
**Richard Knightley**  
 Richard Humphrey  
 Thomas Andrews  
 Thomas Brokesby  
 Edward Griffin  
 Thomas Brudenell  
 John Hazelwood jun.  
 Edward Warner  
 John Lane  
 Thomas Lovett  
 Thomas Cave  
 William Saunders  
 John Barnard  
 Robert Chauntrell

<sup>5</sup> LP 4, 961 n. 12.<sup>6</sup> LP 11, 202 n. 13.



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