



1485: Noble Watershed or Business as Usual?

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1485: Noble Watershed or Business as Usual?

John Cody Parker

A Thesis in the Field of History
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Abstract

Henry VII ruled England for nearly a quarter-century, from 1485 to 1509. While he was on the throne, the civil wars that tore the country apart through much of the previous century burned themselves out, and a new period of comparative calm and stability took hold. Historians long have understood Henry's reign as a period of transition, particularly in his approach to government participation. The medieval period largely saw political power divided between the Crown and the nobility, who frequently vied with one another for supremacy. However, the transformation of that relationship, which began during the previous Yorkist dynasty, markedly increased once Henry ascended the throne. Power ostensibly coalesced around the Tudor Crown and its new middle-class managers as the nobility's role became more advisory and administrative. In its place came educated and able men from the upper gentry, men who owed their elevated positions to the king's favor rather than birth. Their increasing presence represented a shift in the makeup of English government, and it undermined the collective influence of the nobility, who institutionally retreated from the king's presence to a more sedentary, peripheral position.

What typically happened to the displaced nobility? What did it mean to be noble? Contemporary scholarship has focused on Henry's new professional administrators and largely sidestepped the remnants of the nobility. This prioritization risks dismissing the nobility as a purely medieval institution and prematurely concluding its story simultaneously with the Wars of the Roses. While the makeup of Henry's government

shifted towards a new professional-class of men from the ranks of the upper gentry, the nobility did not disappear. It was still very much present even if it no longer enjoyed the same institutional influence it once had. This work explores the period through the prism of three of Henry's most prominent noblemen—John de Vere, thirteenth earl of Oxford, Thomas Howard, first earl of Surrey, and Edward Stafford, third duke of Buckingham—and shows that the nobility was not a monolithic institution during Henry's reign but rather a multifaceted body in various states of flux. In short, there was not a singular way to be noble; how each nobleman carried himself and engaged in his affairs was entirely dependent on his individual relationship with the king.

Each of the three noblemen named above illustrates a different aspect of the shift. It was not a sudden, singular event, nor did it impact all nobles uniformly. Rather, it was thematic in character and gradually transformed the institutional nobility from an arbiter of unbridled royal power to a more advisory and supportive role. Understanding the shift is important because of how it transformed the period's polity. Centuries of established tradition and government administration were largely abandoned, and in their place came the foundation of what would later become the British constitutional monarchy. In this work, I explore the shift and its impacts to gain a better sense of the transition from the medieval to the early modern period and better understand the transformative impacts of England's first Tudor king.

Frontispiece



King Henry VII

by unknown artist, 1505

© National Portrait Gallery, London¹

¹ "King Henry VII," UK National Portrait Gallery, accessed January 18, 2022, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw03078/King-Henry-VII>.

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Table of Contents

Frontispiece.....	v
Acknowledgments.....	vi
List of Figures.....	viii
Chapter I. Introduction.....	1
Chapter II. John de Vere, Thirteenth Earl of Oxford.....	9
De Vere the Noble Lord.....	13
De Vere the Commander	20
De Vere the Peer	26
De Vere the Agent	31
Chapter III. Thomas Howard, First Earl of Surrey	41
Howard the Lieutenant.....	50
Howard the Courtier	64
Chapter IV. Edward Stafford, Third Duke of Buckingham.....	72
Stafford the Protégée.....	82
Stafford the Prince	84
Stafford the Posh.....	93
Stafford the Prototype.....	98
Chapter V. Conclusion.....	111
Bibliography	117

List of Figures

Figure 1. England in 1485.....	8
Figure 2. John de Vere.....	21
Figure 3. The de Vere Earls of Oxford, 1141–1513.	40
Figure 4. Thomas Howard.	51
Figure 5. The de Mowbray and Howard Dukes of Norfolk, 1397–1554.....	71
Figure 6. Edward Stafford.....	79
Figure 7. The Beauforts and the Stafford Dukes of Buckingham, 1373–1521....	110

Chapter I.

Introduction

Historians long have recognized that Henry VII's approach to English government was innovative, though the degree to which this was the case has been subject to debate.² His reign was the first in which the king's closest councilors came from the upper echelons of the gentry rather than from the institutional nobility and were selected for "their financial acumen, their record of loyalty in exile and their flexibility in interpreting the law regardless of the enemies they might make" rather than for their lineage.³ Writing in the 1620s, Francis Bacon reflected on Henry's novel conventions and the pedigree of his councilors, describing how the king "kept a straight hand on his nobility, and chose rather to advance clergymen and lawyers, which were more obsequious to him but had less interest in the people; which made for his absoluteness, but not for his safety."⁴

Most contemporary scholars have accepted Bacon's assessment of Henry's councilors, and several have expanded upon it by emphasizing the progressive increase in government participation by the upper ranks of the educated gentry. In 1917, Gladys

² Sean Cunningham, *Henry VII* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2.

³ Gladys Temperley, *Henry 7* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), 247; J. P. D. Cooper, "Henry VII's New Men and the Making of Tudor England, by Steven Gunn," *The English Historical Review* 133, no. 564 (October 2018): 1297–1298; David Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility: Constructing Aristocracy in England and France 900–1300* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2005), 125.

⁴ Francis Bacon, *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII and Selected Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 201.

Temperley broadened Bacon's argument and described a distinction between what she saw as the "old" and "new" nobility. She wrote that the "new" nobility were those "middle-class misters" chosen by the king to form a "new official class"; they were "men of comparatively obscure birth who owed everything to the king and had no traditions of aristocratic independence."⁵ Her definition provides a basis for elucidating the shift Bacon alluded to: the growing presence and influence of educated members of the gentry in government—undermining the weight and standing of the nobility—and a coalescing of power around the Crown that limited the nobility's power, reducing it to a source of advice and support from its former status as a check to unbridled royal power. Like the nobility, members of Henry's new official class owed their prosperity and position to his favor; however, they relied on their talent to gain favor, unlike the nobility, who instead relied on inherited wealth and status.

The distinction between the "new" and "old" nobilities and the premise of a shift in power between the two raise a series of questions. When did the new nobility begin to supplant the power of the old? What was the impetus for the shift—was it Henry's victory at Bosworth in 1485, or did the shift begin earlier? Was Henry's accession a watershed moment for the English polity, a hard boundary of sorts between the late medieval era and the emergence of the early modern age? Or was it rather part of a continuum—an important occurrence but not necessarily pivotal?

The repercussions of the battle that won Henry his throne long have been subject to dispute and conjecture, but contemporary sources are unclear about the battle's consequences for the nobility as an institution. It would be tempting to simply define

⁵ Temperley, *Henry 7*, 248.

Bosworth as the end of the medieval period and the beginning of the early modern age, but doing so is an overgeneralization and ignores the similarities between Henry's reign and those of his immediate predecessors. Indeed, his victory ushered in a new, markedly different ruling dynasty—the first since the Norman Conquest in 1066. Previous usurpations of the Crown had always been internecine affairs: for example, the Wars of the Roses between the Houses of York and Lancaster was in actuality a conflict between two branches of the Plantagenet dynasty. Henry claimed Plantagenet descent from John of Gaunt, yet Henry's link was arguable since it hinged on a legitimized maternal line and a third wife.⁶ Henry's bloodline was thus far from a stable foundation from which to claim the throne. In reality, his "inheritance" by conquest represented the beginning of a new dynasty largely distinct from its predecessor.

The dividing line between ruling houses is an easy place to insert a boundary between historical ages, but it is only appropriate if the evidence substantiates its placement. Until recently, the prevailing opinion was that the Tudor regime brought about a distinct form of absolutism that replaced the constitutionalism of the Plantagenet period.⁷ This position was advanced by Stanley Bindoff in the 1950s. He argued that Henry's innovative selection of councilors, made up of "men of lower rank and smaller fortune," "minor peers, knights or squires," and "new men, who in turn were wholly dependent upon him for their position and prospects," displaced the great nobles of the realm who had dominated government in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and

⁶ See Figure 7. The Beauforts and the Stafford Dukes of Buckingham, 1373–1521 for an illustration of Henry's claim of Plantagenet descent from John of Gaunt.

⁷ Barbara J. Harris, *Edward Stafford Third Duke of Buckingham, 1478–1521* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 211.

consequently relegated them to a peripheral position that was unable to withstand the centralization of power around the Crown.⁸ He advanced a model of Henry's government in which the nobility was largely sidelined. The gentry, by contrast, held real power and used their professional experience for the king's benefit in exchange for royal favor.⁹ Bindoff's argument thus posits two opposing styles of English government—existing before and after 1485—echoing William Stubbs, who argued that feudal relationships between the Crown and the nobility, and between the nobility and the gentry, were predominantly financial in nature, often expressed by remuneration for feudal service.¹⁰ Stubbs suggested that social conflicts, such as the downward shift in the nobility's power, could be traced to systemic imbalances caused by monetary entanglements between king, nobility, and gentry. He concluded that the nobility's decrease in power was ultimately rooted in changes implemented by Henry to feudal finances that institutionally handicapped it vis-à-vis the rising gentry.

Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, scholars began to challenge the Stubbs–Bindoff thesis. The notion that Bosworth was a watershed moment in English government faded as historians such as Stanley Chrimes, Jack Lander, and Arthur Slavin instead emphasized the continuity and similarities between Yorkist and early Tudor governance, especially where noble relationships were concerned.¹¹ In particular, K. B.

⁸ Stanley Bindoff, *Tudor England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), 58–60.

⁹ Bindoff, *Tudor England*, 56–62.

¹⁰ Christine Carpenter, “Political and Constitutional History: Before and After McFarlane,” in *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society*, by R. H. Britnell and A. J. Pollard (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 178–182.

¹¹ S. B. Chrimes, *Lancastrians, Yorkists, and Henry VII* (London: Macmillan Press, 1964); Jack Lander, *Crown and Nobility 1450–1509* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976); Arthur Slavin, *The Precarious Balance: English Government and Society* (New York: Knopf Publishing, 1973).

McFarlane opposed the idea that Bosworth ushered in a new Tudor model of rulership, writing that “the only New Monarchy that England [has ever known] was William the Conqueror.” He argued that Henry’s reign was a continuation of Yorkist principles rather than a line dividing the English polity. Furthermore, he rejected Stubbs’ claims that financial considerations took priority, arguing instead that feudal relationships were volatile, complex, and variable affiliations based on personal interests and areas of common understanding.¹² Thus, McFarlane reasoned that the coalescing of political power around the Crown and the reduction of the nobility’s power occurred because the nobility found it more advantageous to support the Tudor Crown rather than act counter to it.¹³ As I show below, this interpretation is supported by the case of John de Vere, thirteenth earl of Oxford and the member of the nobility closest to Henry.

In a similar vein, Jack Lander postulated in 1976 that the shift in the nobility’s political role was caused primarily by its social deterioration, which in turn was exploited by a Crown seeking power at the nobility’s expense.¹⁴ Lander’s work offers a compelling account of the vicissitudes of the nobility in the late fifteenth century, although it tends to approach the shift more as a monolithic event rather than a gradual occurrence that impacted members of the nobility differently and at different times. His analysis of Henry’s use of bonds and recognizances as a means to ultimately break the power of the nobility was expanded upon by Steven Gunn, who in *Henry VII’s New Men and the Making of Tudor England* (2016) amplified Lander’s argument that the nobility was too

¹² K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 283.

¹³ McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England*, vii-xxxvii.

¹⁴ Lander, *Crown and Nobility*, 3.

financially incapacitated to meaningfully resist Henry's actions and emphasized the exchange of service for good favor as a focus of Henry's ruling strategy.

Gunn's work pays particular attention to the rising gentry who constituted Henry's "new men." He argues that the king's new professional governing class was key to creating the practices and policies on which the early Tudor government relied and that their growing influence shifted agency away from the nobility and towards men of humbler birth, enhancing Henry's power at the expense of the titled nobility. While Gunn does not directly state that this shift marked a transition between historical eras, his work implies a distinct change in the role of the nobility in Tudor England. Notably, he adopts Bindoff's model, which asserts that Henry's "new men" were capable professionals—primarily lawyers and financial administrators—who were granted ministerial positions according to demonstrated competence rather than lineage. They owed their status and position entirely to the king's patronage and, in exchange, provided him with a well-functioning government that did not attempt to limit his power.¹⁵

As I describe above, scholars of early Tudor rulership and politics tend to focus on those who influenced decisions. In this respect, the new men's growing power is undeniable. Nevertheless, a narrowed focus risks overlooking a still-relevant social group and its effects. While Henry filled much of his council and many royal offices with his new men, the institutional nobility remained a relevant body, still very much present. But what does this mean exactly? What, that is, did it mean to be noble during the shift? Was Henry's accession indeed a watershed moment for the aristocracy, did it represent a continuation of the status quo, or was it something in between?

¹⁵ Gunn, *Henry VII's New Men*, 5–7.

The time is right for a new exploration of these questions, one that brings scholarly focus back to the role, actions, and decisions of the nobility in the early Tudor period. In this thesis, I approach this task by analyzing three of Henry's most prominent noblemen: John de Vere, thirteenth earl of Oxford, Thomas Howard, first earl of Surrey, and Edward Stafford, third duke of Buckingham. As I describe within, each man's career offers a different perspective on what it meant to be, and to act as a noble, making clear that the English aristocracy under Henry was not a monolithic body but rather a diverse one in the process of transformation. De Vere typifies the ideals and expectations of the traditional nobility, with its emphasis on landholding, pedigree, and martial prowess. Howard, on the other hand, found himself wholly dependent on the king's favor for his status, which he (like the "new men") earned through royal service and the cultivation of practical skills and abilities. Finally, Stafford embodied what would become a new model of the nobleman as a refined, wealthy, but emphatically royally oriented courtier.

This thesis argues that the shift in noble ideals and behavior during Henry's reign should be seen as a slow, uneven, and complex process. As McFarlane notes, early Tudor England was governed through personal relationships with the Crown: a diverse and adaptive nobility thus illustrates the complexities Henry faced as he solidified his uncertain grip on power. His throne, and the nobility's status, were interdependent, engaged in an unchoreographed, changing, and mutually suspicious dance. In the following chapters, I explore the varied faces of the early Tudor nobility and the uneven ways in which its social and political role was transformed—a transformation that led to a distinctly new model of royal governance in the sixteenth century and beyond.



Figure 1. England in 1485.

Chapter II.

John de Vere, Thirteenth Earl of Oxford

The standard by which one analyzes medieval English government and the hierarchical relationships of the period's nobility was set by K. B. McFarlane in the 1950s, who approached it from a cultural perspective. He reasoned that feudal relationships were shaped by personal connections and an alignment of self-interests.¹⁶ His proposition diverged considerably from the previous understanding articulated by William Stubbs, who argued that such relationships were conditioned primarily on financial considerations, such as a nobleman's remittances to his retainers or a king's award of a pension or remission of a fine. McFarlane's reassessment portrayed fifteenth-century politics through the lens of personal connections, which could be swayed by the patronage of favors and influence. Thus, he reasoned that the concentration of political power around Henry's Crown existed because the nobility found its interests aligned in service and support of the new king rather than against him. No other nobleman exhibits this alignment better than John de Vere, thirteenth earl of Oxford. He was Henry's closest noble ally, and their relationship substantiates McFarlane's proposition that political power pivoted on personal connections. De Vere and Henry had a symbiotic relationship—a means for each to further his ambitions—and de Vere was the only

¹⁶ McFarlane, *Nobility of Later Medieval England*, vii-xxxvii.

nobleman who had any lasting influence on the king.¹⁷ His actions and motivations were rooted in the traditional, medieval role of the nobility. Thus, he had the most to gain—or lose—from his connection with the king.

The bedrock of de Vere's traditionalism was his lineage, which he could trace back through an unbroken line to the Anarchy in the mid-twelfth century. Empress Matilda, in desperate need of support in her ongoing struggle with King Stephen, created the title "earl of Oxford" for de Vere's seventh great-grandfather, Aubrey de Vere, in 1141 to reward his "devotion" to her cause.¹⁸ While this implies her trust in Aubrey's loyalties, he double-delt both sides and routinely manipulated the "magnanimity" of both Stephen and Matilda to advance his personal ambitions. When Matilda's son Henry ascended the throne in 1154, Aubrey obtained his confirmation of the comital rights and landholdings granted by Matilda, thus affirming his family's elevation into the nobility.¹⁹ Aubrey's line remained unbroken until the death of the twentieth earl of Oxford in 1703, at which time the 562-year-old title became extinct.²⁰

¹⁷ Margaret Condon, "Ruling Elites in the Reign of Henry VII," in *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England*, ed. by Charles Ross (Gloucester: A. Sutton, 1979), 121.

¹⁸ David Crouch, "Vere, Aubrey de, count of Guînes and earl of Oxford (d.1194)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed October 20, 2021. <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/28204>.

¹⁹ Crouch, "Vere, Aubrey de."

²⁰ "Henry and Aubrey de Vere, Earls of Oxford." *Westminster Abbey*, accessed January 17, 2022. <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/henry-and-aubrey-de-vere-earls-of-oxford>. Following the death of the twentieth earl of Oxford in 1703, the title "earl of Oxford" became extinct. It was partially resurrected twice: once in 1711 for Robert Harley as "earl of Oxford and earl Mortimer;" and again in 1925 for Herbert Asquith as "earl of Oxford and Asquith." The plurality of both titles was intentional: the de Vere family is still intact, and conceivably, a descendant could step forward to claim the title. Despite the plurality of the two resurrected titles, both instances were for a single peerage.

Lineage—the generational chain linking an individual to a specific ancestor—was an important concept to the nobility.²¹ Its significance lay in the conveyance of a family’s collective honor and distinction onto successive generations. For de Vere, his lineage connected him to a long-standing right to hold and govern portions of East Anglia on behalf of the Crown: a right that extended back to the formation of Norman England in the 1060s and was later validated by Matilda.²² Few noblemen could boast an unbroken lineage as ancient and continuous as de Vere’s, a fact that elevated his self-importance amongst the peerage and made him, on the basis of tradition, one of the foremost men of the kingdom.²³

Since Henry selected his closest councilors from the educated gentry, de Vere might be expected to have been consigned to an ornamental rather than influential role. However, his circumstances were atypical. His relationship with the king allowed him to pursue activities common to the traditional nobility—a validation of McFarlane’s earlier proposition. De Vere avoided the depreciative fate of other nobles because of his distinction and unblemished loyalty to the Tudor Crown. Beginning with his support of the Lancastrians during the Wars of the Roses and culminating in his command of Henry’s vanguard at Bosworth, he earned an unassailable reputation for fidelity.²⁴ This, combined with the rank his lineage afforded him, made de Vere Henry’s principal

²¹ Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility*, 125.

²² James Ross, *The Foremost Man of the Kingdom: John de Vere, Thirteenth Earl of Oxford (1442-1513)* (Martlesham: The Boydell Press, 2015), 15.

²³ Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 47.

²⁴ Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 114–116;— Steven Gunn, “Vere, John de, thirteenth earl of Oxford (1442-1513).” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed September 9, 2021. <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/28214>; A. J. Pollard, *Late Medieval England 1399-1509* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 346.

nobleman. Polydore Vergil described Henry's euphoric reaction upon de Vere's initial arrival into his coterie while in exile in France in 1484:

Whan Henry saw therle he was ravisshyd with joy incredible that a man of so great nobilytie and knowledge in the warres, and of most perfyte and sounnd fydelytie, most earnestly bent to his syde, was at the last by Gods assistance delyveryd owt of ward, and in so fyt tyme coommyd to help him, in whome he might repose his hope, and settle himself more safely than in any other; for he was not ignorant that others who had holden on king Edward syde yealdid unto him by reason of the evell state of time, but this man who had so oft foughte for king Henry was he thowght delyveryd from that ward by the hevenly help, that he might have one of his owne faction to whom he might safely commyt all thinges; and therfor rejoycing above all measure for therle of Oxfoorthis cooming, he began to hope better of his affaires.²⁵

While Vergil's description shows Henry's enthusiasm at de Vere's preeminence joining his cause, de Vere's motivation was based on the prospect of material gain.

Edward IV attained and forced de Vere into exile in 1475. While a Yorkist regime ruled, de Vere stood little chance of obtaining a reversal of his attainder. Thus, Henry's success in winning the Crown offered him the best possible means to secure his noble restoration. His need to overthrow the Yorkist regime paralleled Henry's as both men stood to gain from a Tudor victory. For this, each needed the other. Vergil captured the genesis of their symbiotic relationship, which formed the foundation for their subsequent life-long amity.

In essence, de Vere was a holdover who embodied the conventional rather than the innovative, flexible only to the extent necessary to protect his noble position. His alliance with the king combined with Henry's confidence in him allowed him to occupy himself with traditional noble concerns such as managing his estates, provisioning military service, and participating in courtly ceremonies and rituals. Yet, for all of these

²⁵ Polydore Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History: Comprising the Reigns of Henry VI., Edward IV., and Richard III*, ed. Henry Ellis (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1844), 208–209.

conventional endeavors, he still had to adapt himself to the king's authority, even when doing so went against his self-interest. The growing shift in the nobility's power meant that institutionally it was no longer able to curtail the king's power: alignment with—not opposition to—the Crown offered the greatest opportunity for advancement and protection, which is why de Vere became an agent of Henry's recognizance policies. By becoming the king's agent-administrator, de Vere shielded himself from the policies' most encumbering ramifications, which in turn enhanced his financial security and increased his regional domination. This adaptive approach may not have boosted his short-term interests amongst his peers, but it enhanced his long-term security. In terms of the shift, his preeminence and traditionalism reflect the period before the new men's supplantation of the nobility in the king's orbit. As power coalesced around the Crown and the nobility's influence waned, de Vere's symbiotic relationship with Henry was evidence that the shift had not fully replaced the king's reliance on his nobles.

De Vere the Noble Lord

While it can be argued that a nobleman's power came from a variety of sources, such as kinship, marriage connections, relationship with the Crown, monetary wealth, or retinue size, all of these depended upon the possession of—and ability to exploit—landed estates. Land conferred power in a way that connections, relationships, wealth, and retinues could not, in that it produced material gains and could be bequeathed across generations.²⁶ Aware of land's implications, nobles regularly sought to expand their

²⁶ Rosemary Horrox, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2–3.

holdings to increase their power. De Vere's ambitions were similar.²⁷ A nobleman who lacked sufficient land assets jeopardized the degree of his influence. He even risked being forced to relinquish his titles and rank. Such a fate befell Edmund de la Pole, third duke of Suffolk, when he was reduced to earl of Suffolk in 1493 due to, amongst other reasons, insufficient land holdings to maintain his ducal title.²⁸

In August 1485, de Vere was an attained earl without any lands to his name. The loss of his family's lands in East Anglia blemished his honor, and their recovery was his principal motivation for joining Henry's cause.²⁹ His logic was straightforward: if he aligned himself with Henry, and if Henry was able to seize the Crown from Richard, then he would be well-positioned to obtain the restoration of his estates and titles. His lands and rank had been passed down through an unbroken lineage stretching back ten generations and thirteen different earls—he was not prepared to be the de Vere who broke the line.

What Henry needed most following Bosworth was security. This provided de Vere with the opportunity to petition parliament for the reversal of his attainder. If his holdings and status were returned, then he could serve the king by pacifying East Anglia

²⁷ Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 89–94.

²⁸ Chris Given-Wilson, Paul Brand, Seymour Phillips, Mark Ormrod, Geoffrey Martin, Anne Curry and Rosemary Horrox, "Henry VII: October 1495," in *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*. British History Online, accessed October 14, 2021, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/parliament-rolls-medieval/october-1495>. Edmund de la Pole played a consequential role during Henry's reign, playing the part of both loyal military commander and rival claimant to the throne. Alison Hanham wrote an excellent article on Edmund in which she explores the dichotomy of his character. For more information, please see her article "Edmund de la Pole, Defector" in *Renaissance Studies* 2, no. 2 (1988): 240–50. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24409400>.

²⁹ Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 15.

on his behalf and extending his authority.³⁰ The records from Henry's first parliament in November 1485 show that de Vere's lands were swiftly restored. This implies that Henry also viewed de Vere's restoration as imperative to stabilizing the new regime. Notably, de Vere's matter was the fourth to be considered, preceded only by that of the king's blood-uncle, the duke of Bedford, and the affairs of two of his military commanders, both of whom were busy suppressing the restless North.³¹ The speed of de Vere's restoration shows his importance within the king's orbit in that his matter was only lower in priority than the king's family and those requiring resources to secure the realm. It also evidences that his issue was crucial to Henry's domination of the strategic East Anglian counties northeast of London, thereby bonding his position to Henry's throne. Clearly, their ambitions were aligned, which underpinned their symbiotic relationship.

Securing the king's authority allowed de Vere an occasion not only to obtain the return of his lands but also to reassert his regional domination—necessary for any noble desiring royal influence. Following his restoration, he quickly absorbed the powers and prerogatives previously held in East Anglia by the Yorkist-leaning de la Pole and Howard families, both of whom were sharply reduced in status. As articulated by the historian David Crouch, the political composition of the shires was an expression of the communal will of its free landowners. Thus, how de Vere handled the previous regime's supporters decided the regional stability of the fledgling Tudor regime.³² Here, he wisely exercised

³⁰ Chris Given-Wilson, Paul Brand, Seymour Phillips, Mark Ormrod, Geoffrey Martin, Anne Curry and Rosemary Horrox, "Henry VII: November 1485, Part 1," in *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*. British History Online, accessed September 15, 2021, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/parliament-rolls-medieval/november-1485-pt-1>.

³¹ Given-Wilson, et al., "Henry VII: November 1485, Part 1."

³² Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility*, 296.

good lordship and sought a passive reconciliation with existing Yorkist sympathizers. This, in turn, ingratiated him with the region's polity, which also extended Henry's security and authority.³³ The sudden rise of the Tudor regime necessitated a shrewd approach: loyalties to the previous establishment were ingrained into the region's political structure, and they needed to be tactfully pacified and realigned. De Vere's approach to Thomas Howard's popular wife, Elizabeth Tylney, the former countess of Surrey, demonstrates his delicacy in handling such matters. As the wife of an attained Yorkist, she faced bleak prospects. But rather than antagonize the region's entrenched Yorkist sympathies and punish her for Howard's "misdeeds," de Vere prudently protected her financial interests and pursued a conciliatory exchange with her and other leading East Anglian Yorkists.

Tylney responded positively to de Vere's actions, writing that he was a
singuler very good and kynde lord to myn lord and me, and stedefaste in hys promys, wher by he hath wonne myn lordys service as longe as he leevyth, and me to be hys trewe beedwoman terme of myn lyve; for hym I drede mooste, and yit as hyther to I fynde hym beste.³⁴

Her words suggest recognition and appreciation of de Vere's efforts to pacify, a view shared by other Yorkists who feared retribution by the new regime.³⁵ Such endeavors must have numbed some of the sting of being on the losing side, which in turn helped to abate resistance to both de Vere's and the king's newly installed authority. Indeed,

³³ Cunningham, *Henry VII*, 187.

³⁴ "The Paston Letters, Volume VI (of 6), Part 1 (Letters, Chronological Table), edited by James Gairdner," Project Gutenberg, accessed November 29, 2021, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/42240/42240-h/42240-h.htm>.

³⁵ Chris Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1987), 16-17; Cunningham, *Henry VII*, 187.

Tylney was fortunate that, despite decades of antagonism between the de Veres and Howards, de Vere chose to be magnanimous towards her in her time of need.³⁶ Nevertheless, as with his arrival into Henry's camp in 1484, his real motivation towards her was the prospect of gain—in this case, uncontested power and influence in his restored lands. Overall, de Vere's efforts meant that East Anglia remained relatively calm and generally supportive of the Tudor regime throughout Henry's reign. His actions exemplify the purpose of the traditional nobleman—to be the physical link between the king and the shires. As English politics were chiefly local affairs, his integration into the East Anglian polity extended the power of the Crown.³⁷ That was his role and his duty.

An equally important aspect of medieval lordship was imposing and taking advantage of fealty dues and homages. That de Vere collected such payments is nothing remarkable: he was entitled to them and did what was typical of the period's nobility. What is notable, however, is *when* he collected his dues and what the timing implies about his and Henry's respective lordships. He was, of course, the king's man in East Anglia—restored to control the area on Henry's behalf. Any missteps on his part would have detrimental effects on the overall stability of the Tudor regime; thus, he was cautious in how he exercised his noble rights as part of his pacification efforts.

A closer look at the relief payments de Vere received at his Hedingham estate reveals how sensitively he exercised these rights. Before a tenant could take possession of his fief, he was obliged to first pay his lord a percentage of its value and perform homage.

³⁶ Kirsten Claiden-Yardley, *The Man Behind the Tudors: Thomas Howard, 2nd Duke of Norfolk* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books, 2020), 51.

³⁷ Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility*, 202.

The “relief” was a one-off payment that is comparable to a modern-day death duty or inheritance tax. In instances where the tenant was underage, the lord could retain the bequeathal “in trust” for his own profit until the tenant came of age, made the relief payment, and performed homage.³⁸ It was a lucrative arrangement for the nobility, and records show that de Vere profited well from exercising this feudal right but only in the second half of Henry’s reign.³⁹

Documents from de Vere’s household indicate that he did not start receiving relief payments until early 1498, thirteen years after Bosworth. This was due primarily to his close alignment with Henry’s regime, which placed him in a volatile position until Henry’s crown was more secure. The first half of the reign was demonstrably unstable, and many rebellions—such as the 1486 Stafford Rebellion, the 1487 Simnel Rebellion, the 1496 Warbeck Rebellion, and other lesser intrigues—sought to overthrow the regime. That de Vere did not exercise some of his feudal rights until 1498 shows his desire to not provoke his tenant population as an instrument of pacification. Both he and Henry were in the midst of establishing their respective lordships in the post-Yorkist polity, and both required solid foundations of stable loyalty from their subordinate populations. A restless populace ran counter to this.⁴⁰ Once the Warbeck Rebellion had been effectively crushed and the king’s authority unquestionably established, de Vere was secure enough to exercise more of his feudal prerogatives without fear of conflict.

³⁸ Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 111.

³⁹ Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility*, 280.

⁴⁰ Sean Cunningham, *Prince Arthur, The Tudor King Who Never Was* (Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2016), 12–13.

De Vere's receipt of feudal relief payments was intended to demonstrate his noble authority more than it was supporting his finances. If we compare his proceeds from 1498 to 1509, when he took such payments, to the period between 1485 and 1497, when he did not, then it appears that de Vere only forfeit £120 in relief payments from his principal Hedingham estate, and slightly more if his other smaller estates are considered. But taking into account that his annual income typically exceeded £4,000, it is clear that the sum of forfeited payments made up a negligible proportion of his annual revenue.⁴¹ Therefore, if the purpose of the relief payments was to increase revenue but annual revenue was already sufficient, then de Vere's foregoing of such payments was likely a power concession made to incentivize a passive tenantry when Henry's crown and his own position were less stable. James Ross argues that de Vere's decision to start collecting feudal dues in 1498 "stemmed from financial motives, with the earl copying his sovereign's attempts to maximize his income."⁴² That this occurred only *after* Henry secured his crown corroborates the conclusion that de Vere tactfully exercised his feudal rights, mindful that his first duty was to secure his lands on behalf of the king rather than filling his purse.

This demonstrates that de Vere's main role in East Anglia was as the intermediary link between the king and his subjects. Crouch's contention that medieval English politics were a collection of local affairs is well supported by de Vere's role in realigning East Anglian loyalties to the new Tudor regime.⁴³ This evinces a traditional purpose of

⁴¹ Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 111.

⁴² Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 105.

⁴³ Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility*, 202.

the nobility: to facilitate the king's rulership in their lands. This is best exemplified by realigning a region's loyalties to a new regime, particularly a region that had previously resisted the rise of that regime. In this respect, de Vere's symbiotic relationship with Henry illustrates the conventional connection between nobleman and king. Their relationship argues that the shift was less pronounced with respect to de Vere than other members of the nobility in that Henry relied first and foremost on him rather than his new men to control East Anglia.

De Vere the Commander

While proper lineage was always key to a nobleman's status, he was also expected to lead an honorable life worthy of his rank. It was by defending the realm that the nobility justified its societal position.⁴⁴ Consequently, noblemen who at no point took up serviceable arms were exceptionally rare.⁴⁵ However, the institutional nobility was not just a fighting class; it was also a ruling class. Partaking in both warfare and government were intrinsic institutional duties, the performance of which on behalf of the king justified the nobility's existence.⁴⁶ In both respects, de Vere displays the conventional disposition of the nobility as Henry's most steadfast servant.

With Henry's ascension, de Vere's status changed from that of a traitorous rebel to a restored peer of the realm. He aligned his ambitions with the new regime; its security was his security, and defending it was essential to maintaining his lands and privileges.

⁴⁴ Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility*, 80–81.

⁴⁵ Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility*, 2; Pollard, *Late Medieval England*, 252.

⁴⁶ Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility*, 2–3.

Henry had no shortage of enemies. Disaffected Yorkists viewed his claim as inferior to other Yorkists' and his throne as stolen. Consequently, de Vere had to be active in defending Henry's crown from frequent uprisings, chiefly because his station required it but also out of self-interest: a restored Yorkist regime could strip him of his recent gains.



Figure 2. John de Vere.⁴⁷

The first major challenge to Henry's reign unfolded during the winter of 1486. Aggrieved Yorkists put forth a young boy, Lambert Simnel—said in period documentation to be the son of a common laborer—as Edward Plantagenet, seventeenth earl of Warwick, son and heir of George, duke of Clarence, and rightful heir to the throne

⁴⁷ "John de Vere, Earl of Oxford," Shakespeare and History, accessed January 18, 2022, <http://www.shakespeareandhistory.com/john-de-vere-earl-of-oxford.php>.

if the Yorkist line continued.⁴⁸ What became known as Simnel's Rebellion constituted a significant threat to the stability of Henry's largely untested throne. To curb the rebellion's growing support and prevent potential collusion, Henry ordered the arrest of several prominent Yorkists, among them Thomas Grey, first marquess of Dorset. Grey was the stepbrother of the king's wife, Elizabeth of York. Normally, his relation to Queen Elizabeth should have protected him. However, Henry was acutely suspicious of him following his desertion from the field at Bosworth right before Richard III's attack, and he feared his true loyalties lay with his Yorkist bloodline.⁴⁹ While not providing him full absolution, Grey's affinity to the queen did entitle him to certain benefits, among them detainment by a man of comparable rank. The king commanded de Vere to personally arrest Grey and "conveigh him to the Towre of London, to trye his truth and prove his pacience." What Henry required of Grey was unquestionable loyalty to himself—he was not willing to risk Grey's potential collusion with the rebellion, no matter his connection to Elizabeth.⁵⁰

The significance of this command is twofold. First, it illustrates the Crown's confidence in de Vere's allegiance to the shaky Tudor regime during the first major challenge to Henry's kingship. Second, it shows de Vere as an agent of the regime, performing his feudal duties as expected as a restored member of the nobility. Henry's

⁴⁸ Michael J. Bennett, "Simnel, Lambert," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed October 19, 2021, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/25569>; Temperley, *Henry* 7, 58; S. B. Chrimes, *Henry VII* (London: Yale University Press, 1999) 73; Cunningham, *Henry VII*, 55.

⁴⁹ T. B. Pugh, "Grey, Thomas, first marquess of Dorset," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed October 19, 2021, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/11560>.

⁵⁰ Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle; Containing the History of England, during the Reign of Henry the Fourth, and the Succeeding Monarchs, to the End of the Reign of Henry the Eighth* (London, Printed for J. Johnson, et. al., 1809) 433.

command to de Vere was itself a statement of his trust as well as a convenient use of their symbiotic relationship. While the exercise may be viewed as “just an arrest,” the context of the participants is also relevant. Henry’s regime was frail, and the likelihood of conspirators proximate to his person was real; furthermore, there was no guarantee that de Vere would support him in this first real test of his authority. It was the first time he was called upon to perform such service following his restoration, and his faithful and successful stewardship of the king’s trust demonstrates his embodiment of the traditional noble code of conduct.

After detaining Grey, de Vere moved his retinue to rendezvous with the royal army and engage Simnel’s forces. Heralds serving the king near Stoke Field recorded de Vere’s open enthusiasm at the prospect of battling “traitors,” with one writing that “Oxenforde desired and besought the kyng to have the conduyt of the Forward, which the king grauntede and accompanied him with many great coragious and lusty knights.”⁵¹ This demonstrates de Vere’s eagerness to physically lead in defense of the king’s realm, another manifestation of his noble ethos. During a period that saw a downward shift in the nobility’s power, de Vere’s actions at the Battle of Stoke Field show that the Crown was still reliant on the nobility to serve and defend it. There is no significant difference between de Vere’s actions at Stoke and those of his forebears two hundred years earlier. His actions show that the period cannot be uncritically deemed “early modern”; remnants of the earlier medieval period were still prevalent in the English polity. Nor was the nobility completely ornamental and sidelined; rather, certain aspects of it were still

⁵¹ Emma Cavell, *The Heralds' Memoir 1486–1490: Court Ceremony, Royal Progress, and Rebellion* (Donington: Richard III and Yorkist History Trust, 2009), 112.

indispensable to the Crown's stability. While the shift was indeed ongoing—as Henry was beginning to direct royal finances through his new man household treasurer Thomas Lovell rather than his exchequer's office—as it relates to de Vere, it was still mostly inapplicable, thus exhibiting the uneven nature of the shift with respect to the nobility.⁵²

Simnel's Rebellion, though significant, was not the greatest challenge to Henry's rule. That distinction belongs to the 1496 Warbeck Rebellion. The timing of this rebellion, some twelve years after Bosworth, meant that both Henry and de Vere were more secure in their respective positions when it occurred. In East Anglia, de Vere's pacification efforts meant that many of the former de Mowbray affinities—families such as the Debenhams, Brandons, and Chamberlains—had realigned their loyalties to him and, by proxy, to Henry.⁵³ However, pro-Yorkist sympathies lingered in England, particularly in the North, as well as in Scotland and on the continent. The breadth of dissent made this uprising more dangerous than the earlier Simnel Rebellion. As he had done previously, de Vere responded according to the traditional purpose of his position—reliable, chivalric service to his lord in the realm's defense.

In 1496, Henry was under the threat of invasion from three separate fronts: Ireland, Scotland, and the continent. Henry gave de Vere primary responsibility for the defense of East Anglia, which historically had been used as a conduit to London. This was a sensible assignment given his regional domination and martial record. Henry positioned himself along the south coast of East Anglia, adjacent to Kent, keeping de

⁵² Gunn, *Henry VII's New Men*, 83.

⁵³ Ian Arthurson, *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy 1491–1499* (Gloucestershire: History Press, 2009), 132–133.

Vere nearby and able to quickly augment the king's forces should the need arise. Letters from the Paston collection describe that leading elements of de Vere's retinue were marshaled in Canterbury as the threat of invasion increased.⁵⁴ When Warbeck's supporters attempted an incursionary landing to probe coastal fortifications, de Vere's rapid deployment of regional defenses forced them back across the Channel before any major fighting occurred. Robert Crowmer, a steward in de Vere's service, wrote to John Paston boasting of their preparations and role in preventing an invasion, saying, "I desyre and pray you to come sporte you, and to see how weell we have appareld and furnyshid our town."⁵⁵

By this period, the king's council had become the dominant institution of the royal government in an unprecedented way.⁵⁶ While it brought together the peers trusted by Henry along with the realm's leading bishops, household noblemen, and knights, its deliberations and actions were largely directed by the new men.⁵⁷ The proportion of their members on the council steadily increased throughout Henry's reign, while the corresponding number of nobles decreased. Steven Gunn describes the growing influence of predominantly eight new men, while the great nobles never numbered higher than five.⁵⁸ However, de Vere shows that the shift had not entirely swept away the institutional nobility nor made it an irrelevant institution—it was still germane to the kingdom's

⁵⁴ Arthurson, 157.

⁵⁵ Project Gutenberg, "The Paston Letters, Volume VI."

⁵⁶ Gunn, *Henry VII's New Men*, 39.

⁵⁷ Gunn, 40.

⁵⁸ Steven Gunn, "The Courtiers of Henry VII," *The English Historical Review* 108, no. 426 (1993): 23-49, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/573548>.

functioning. Henry's power, particularly at the fringes of the kingdom, was still heavily dependent on his great noble lords, whose military capabilities allowed them to impose his order and mobilize local defenses to defend the larger realm.⁵⁹

De Vere the Peer

The power and majesty of the royal court were displayed through courtly ceremonies, and nobles demonstrated their prestige and status by participating in the ceremonials. As Henry's "leading courtier" and the realm's Lord Great Chamberlain, de Vere's presence and proximity to the king reflected both his favor and the splendor of the court itself. While his responsibilities in East Anglia often kept him away, he was present for the most important events.⁶⁰ The Lord Great Chamberlain's office—first awarded to de Vere's eighth great-grandfather in 1133 by Henry I and subsequently passed down in an almost unbroken line—had been associated with the de Vere family even longer than their comital title.⁶¹ It ensured de Vere a prominent location whenever present at court. By his attendance alone, he wielded great influence over lesser men even as the new men continued to grow in number and stature.⁶²

⁵⁹ Gunn, *Henry VII's New Men*, 88–89.

⁶⁰ David Starkey, *Henry: Virtuous Prince* (London: Harper Press, 2008), 44; Temperley, *Henry 7*, 40; Leopold G. Wickham Legg, ed., *English Coronation Records* (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co. Ltd., 1901) 221.

⁶¹ RaGena C. DeAragon, "Vere, Aubrey de," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed October 23, 2021, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/28203>.

⁶² Starkey, *Virtuous Prince*, 44.

The first of Henry's important ceremonies was his coronation, with all of the pomp and tradition expected of such a sacrament.⁶³ De Vere's prominence in this event indicates that the shift had not altered his ceremonial status and that Henry saw the nobility as an essential element of the ritual performance of kingship. This was partially due to his need to appear *as part* of the English polity rather than as a foreigner imitating it. He was, after all, an exile who had taken the Crown by conquest. On the eve of the coronation, de Vere—as Chamberlain—had the distinguished task of serving the king the main course at the evening's dinner.

Historians long have recognized that meals, in particular festive meals, were indicators of a nobleman's status with the king.⁶⁴ Courtiers serving the king were not ordinary servants, but rather peers installed as an affirmation of trust. As the handling of food provided an opportunity to inflict harm, only the most trusted were allowed in such delicate positions.⁶⁵ De Vere was one of the most observed men throughout the day's events. He dressed the king, escorted him to Westminster Abbey, bore his train as he entered the church, invested him with the insignia of rule, placed the crown upon his bare head at the coronation banquet, and again served Henry the main course at the evening's feast.⁶⁶ De Vere's role throughout the festivities visually connected Henry to English traditions and served as a statement of the nobility's then-unchanged position within the

⁶³ Legg, *English Coronation Records*, 221–222.

⁶⁴ Alban Gautier, "Butlers and Dish-bearers in Anglo-Saxon Courts: Household Officers at the Royal Table," *Historical Research* 90 no. 248 (May 2017): 269–295, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1111/1468-2281.12181>.

⁶⁵ Gautier, "Butlers and Dish-bearers," 286.

⁶⁶ J. Horace Round, "The Lord Great Chamberlain," *The Monthly Review* 7, no. 21 (June 1902): 42–58; Gunn, "Vere, John de, thirteenth earl of Oxford (1442–1513); Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 60.

new regime. Optically, this was significant, as Henry's ascension marked the first new dynasty in over four hundred years. While his reign later showed favor to the new men over the nobility, Henry, in the beginning at least, played by the rules, and de Vere was his key to that.

The next state spectacle that involved de Vere was the coronation of Henry's wife, Elizabeth of York, which took place on November 25, 1487. Unlike their wedding ceremony the previous January, which was a quiet affair to avoid Henry appearing dependent on his wife's lineage for the crown, Elizabeth's coronation was an elaborate pageant, designed to appease disaffected Yorkists following the defeat of Simnel's Rebellion the preceding summer.⁶⁷ As with Henry's coronation, de Vere was prominently at the center of the richly attended ceremonies. During the queen's ceremonial procession, de Vere was the second nobleman to enter the Abbey, preceded only by the king's uncle, the duke of Bedford, whose blood connection entitled him to the leading position. Following de Vere was the king's stepfather, the earl of Derby, then the earl of

⁶⁷ John of Gaunt is commonly referred to as the "first Lancastrian" because his father, Edward III, created the title "duke of Lancaster" for him in 1362. As the third son of Edward III, Gaunt was not expected to inherit the throne. Edward's oldest son, another Edward (known to history as the "Black Prince") was the heir apparent, but he died before his father, and therefore his son inherited the throne as Richard II. Richard proved to be an unpopular king, and Gaunt's eldest son, Henry Bolingbroke, usurped his cousin's throne and became Henry IV in 1399. The dynastic fighting known as the Wars of the Roses, between the houses of York and Lancaster, can trace its origins to Edward III and the intermarriages of his descendants.

Gaunt had three wives. Katherine Swynford, his third and final wife, had been his mistress for many years. Their children were born before Gaunt and Swynford were married in 1396 and therefore were considered illegitimate. Richard II later legitimized Gaunt and Swynford's children, though a provision was included that specifically barred their line from the succession. It is through this line, however—notably John Beaufort (Gaunt's eldest son by Swynford and Henry IV's half-brother)—that Henry VII later claimed the mantle of the house of Lancaster. For more information, see pages 214–216 of Helen Carr's *The Red Prince John of Gaunt* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2021).

Nottingham, and finally the duke of Suffolk.⁶⁸ As the order of entry was critical in such a ceremony, de Vere's placement signals his continued importance in Henry's court. His only major limitation was his lack of Tudor blood. Had he been connected by blood to the king, it is likely his intimacy with Henry would have moved him ahead of Bedford. Despite this, his wife was made the queen's principal attendant during the ceremony, a reflection of de Vere's own high status and closeness to the king.⁶⁹

The nearness between de Vere and the royal family can also be seen in his closeness to Prince Arthur. The king's heir was born on November 2, 1486. His birth brought a sense of relief for both the king and England, as the country had not known a peaceful transfer of the crown since 1422. Henry appointed de Vere—along with his stepfather Thomas Stanley, first earl of Derby, and William FitzAlan, sixteenth earl of Arundel—to serve as Arthur's male godparents. Notably, Henry surrounded his heir with members of the nobility rather than his new men, who were becoming more influential at court. This suggests that while the English government's administrative influence may have been changing, the visual pageantry and physical proximity of the nobility to the Crown remained consistent during the early years of Henry's reign.

Arthur was born early, and as a consequence, de Vere was away at his Lavenham estate and not near the king's person at Winchester as would normally be expected. Henry delayed Arthur's christening by four days to allow de Vere time to arrive, a risky proposition in an age of high infant mortality and when the Catholic church

⁶⁸ Nicholas Harris Nicolas, *Privy Purse Expenses of Elizabeth of York: Wardrobe Accounts of Edward the Fourth. With a Memoir of Elizabeth of York, and Notes* (London: William Pickering, 1830), 73.

⁶⁹ Nicolas, 73.

recommended baptism without delay in case of the unthinkable.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, de Vere's presence was worth the gamble; he did not attend the christening as a friend of the king but rather as a representative of the institutional nobility, symbolically affirming the prince's position as heir. The ceremony served to confirm the succession more than welcome Arthur into the community of Christ. Accordingly, de Vere's attendance was essential. For a country that had been ravaged by years of successional strife, the prince's christening hinted at an eventual peaceful transfer of power.

De Vere's importance in each of these ceremonies is significant for what it says about his standing within the regime, and by association, about the status of the nobility. While Henry's new men increased their roles in government administration, their lower social origins kept them from replacing the nobility in the visible displays of courtly majesty.⁷¹ This shows an increasingly common theme of the shift: the narrowing role of the nobility to visible pageantry rather than a dual role in both the administration of government and courtly ceremony. This is not to argue that the shift applied *equally* to all noblemen. De Vere, as shall be discussed, maintained a limited administrative function in Henry's government. However, performing those functions served primarily to protect his interests by maintaining a favorable standing with the king. In general, the weight Henry placed on the nobility's presence at courtly ceremonies, rather than on their administrative functions or abilities, foreshadowed the institution's shift to an ornamental rather than influential role.

⁷⁰ "Code of Canon Law, Canon 867," IntraText CT, accessed January 17, 2022, http://www.intratext.com/ixt/eng0017/_p2w.htm.

⁷¹ Gunn, *Henry VII's New Men*, 319–321.

De Vere the Agent

Despite being the realm's leading nobleman, de Vere's close relationship with the king did not exempt him from yielding to the king's will. Henry did not come to the throne with a desire to share power amongst a ruling class. Rather, he sought to consolidate power around his person as much as possible, and no other king to date had mastered the practical demands of rulership to the same extent as Henry.⁷² De Vere was not an innovative man, and there is little indication that he sought to develop or define a new way of operating within his position. However, he understood that Henry's regime was different from those that had preceded it—it was evident that the influence of the nobility was waning in favor of Henry's new "middle-class ministers." Thus, to preserve favorable standing with Henry, de Vere effectuated many of the king's recognizance policies—which were designed to diminish the power and influence of the nobility—by becoming an agent of their collection. This adaptation ultimately enhanced de Vere's own standing, but only to the extent allowed by Henry's domination.

Not all noblemen shared de Vere's deeply ingrained loyal disposition to the Tudor Crown. The heart of the nobility's power was money, and they used it to retain expansive household affinities, provision private armies, and build defensible castles—all of which checked royal power. Thus, to weaken the nobility, Henry sought to limit the power of its money. During the first half of his reign, he accomplished this by restricting certain ways in which the nobility could spend its capital. His first parliament in November 1485 passed measures restricting the nobility's maintenance and livery rights, while at the same time obliging the lords, Commons, and household men to swear oaths upholding

⁷² Cunningham, *Henry VII*, 3–5.

the royal supremacy.⁷³ In effect, this removed the nobility's capacity to unilaterally hire private armies, while concurrently requiring an affirmation of their subservience to the Crown—at least on paper.⁷⁴ The age-old practice of hiring armed retainers was too important for most to give up at once; thus, throughout the late-1480s and 1490s, parliament gradually increased the penalties for noncompliance in an effort to realign noble habits to the king's conditions.⁷⁵ During Henry's 24-year reign, these laws reduced the number of independent affinities, resulting in further degradation of the nobility's prerogative to a more advisory and supportive role rather than as an arbiter of royal power. However, the goal of such laws was never to fully curtail the nobility's right to armed affinities; the Crown still depended on these forces to respond to emergencies. The objective was simply to remove the nobility's ability to challenge royal authority by reducing the number, lethality, and pseudo-independence of their private armies.

Limiting *how* the nobility could spend its money was only part of the equation; restricting its *access* to capital was a far more effective tool for curtailing their independence. Here is where de Vere excelled, thereby exhibiting his loyalty to the king even at the expense of his own class, the nobility. As Sean Cunningham described, “the one outstanding aspect of Henry's reign that all early Tudor historians have agreed upon is his use of bonds, recognisances, obligations and suspended fines as instruments to manipulate the behaviour of his subjects.”⁷⁶ By “manipulate,” Cunningham means

⁷³ Cunningham, *Henry VII*, 210.

⁷⁴ Given-Wilson, et al., “Henry VII: November 1485, Part 1.”

⁷⁵ Temperley, *Henry 7*, 246.

⁷⁶ Cunningham, *Henry VII*, 215.

“dominate and control,” and though he uses the word “subjects,” the primary targets of such instruments were monied members of the nobility and the upper gentry. Ironically, Henry’s use of such measures became more widespread after the major threats to his political power had been overcome in the late 1490s. Thus, these instruments were effectively tools for *enforcing* and *furthering* Tudor control rather than *attaining* it.

It seems counterintuitive that de Vere, as the preeminent member of the nobility, acted in a manner that further weakened the institution. He served as the king’s agent and collector of his takes, but this strategically kept him from becoming a target himself.⁷⁷ Comparatively speaking, if his fellow nobles found their power curtailed while his remained untouched, then his power increased relative to theirs. Henry had no reason to doubt de Vere’s loyalty to his regime. Repeatedly, even before Bosworth, de Vere proved his fidelity, and as shown, their fortunes were tightly intertwined given their relational proximity; thus, de Vere had already bonded himself to the Crown. The same could not be said for the rest of the nobility, of whom Henry remained deeply suspicious.⁷⁸

Henry used bonds and recognizances to diminish the independence of the nobility and upper gentry, making the financial price of rebellion and disloyalty ruinous. As the king’s man in East Anglia, de Vere’s primary responsibility to the king was securing these strategically important counties and ensuring their obedience. On at least three occasions, Henry commanded him to take recognizances from members of the East Anglian gentry to ensure their continued docility and allegiance—itsself a recognition of

⁷⁷ Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 129.

⁷⁸ Cunningham, *Henry VII*, 215.

the upper gentry's growing power and evidence of Henry's paranoia about the risk of potential challengers.⁷⁹

The first recorded account of de Vere acting as the king's recognizance agent occurred on January 20, 1488, when he took a recognizance of £2,000 from the "disobedient" Sir Edmund Hastings. Hastings was rumored to harbor lingering pro-Yorkist sympathies and may have been involved in coordinating a plot to overthrow Henry's regime with representatives of Margaret of Burgundy's court. The evidence against him was weak, but Henry used the crushing £2,000 recognizance to incentivize Hastings' "reorientation" towards loyal obedience.⁸⁰ In 1504, de Vere again obtained a substantial recognizance on behalf of the king, this time from Thomas Wyndham.

Wyndham was the son and heir of a Norfolk knight who fell under de Vere's purview. He had inherited a large fortune, and like Hastings, his loyalty was rumored to lean towards suspected Yorkist rebels.⁸¹ As had been done with Hastings, de Vere extracted a heavy recognizance to ensure the price of rebellion remained out of reach. Whether either man would have risen up against Henry had de Vere not squeezed them so is a matter of speculation, but it is clear that, at least to Henry, such practices were necessary to secure his crown.

⁷⁹ Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 129.

⁸⁰ Sean Cunningham, "Loyalty and the Usurper: Recognizances, the Council and Allegiance Under Henry VII," *Historical Research: the Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 82, no: 217: 471, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2281.2009.00500.x>.

⁸¹ Sean Cunningham, "Pole, Edmund de la, eighth earl of Suffolk," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed September 9, 2021, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/22446>; Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 129.

The largest such action conducted by de Vere was in response to the suspicious activities of Edmund de la Pole, sixth earl of Suffolk. After de la Pole's self-imposed exile and defection in 1501, Henry feared his followers would aid him if he invaded Cornwall and attempted to depose the regime. Cornwall's location across the Channel from several Yorkist continental power bases made it a restive area. De Vere forcibly put down two moderately sized rebellions there in 1497. Henry commanded him to forcibly issue a crushing number of security bonds from suspected rebels to facilitate the region's pacification.⁸² His taking of forty-one bonds under this commission involved some sixty-one members of de la Pole's former affinity, which included yeomen, gentlemen of the household, esquires, and at least one knight. These bonds, some of which were upwards of £200, were enough to procure the "loyalty" of those suspected of supporting de la Pole and "effectively snuffed out any potential rebellion on the de la Pole estates in East Anglia."⁸³ Not even de la Pole's wife, Margaret, the former countess of Suffolk, was free from de Vere's bonding. Her own money was used to pay for de Vere's monitoring of her activities after de la Pole fled to the continent.⁸⁴

The significance of de Vere's actions becomes clearer when viewed within the context of his relationship with Henry. His role was reactive: responding to threats as they occurred, compelling allegiance to the king, and suppressing rebellious activities. This was a strong testament not only to Henry's trust in him but to how he helped stabilize the king's power in East Anglia. This is why Henry never targeted de Vere in

⁸² Cunningham, "Loyalty and the Usurper," 475; Cunningham, "Pole, Edmund de la, eighth earl of Suffolk;" Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 129.

⁸³ Cunningham, "Loyalty and the Usurper," 475.

⁸⁴ Cunningham, "Loyalty and the Usurper," 478.

the recognizance policy but made him an *administrator* thereof. Of the noblemen with the resources to challenge the king's authority, de Vere ranked near the top. Yet Henry did not require a bond from de Vere—itsself evidence that he felt that de Vere's fidelity was dependable. So confident was Henry in his preeminent nobleman that he greatly enhanced de Vere's personal financial position by allowing him to hold the recognizances and bonds he collected in his own treasury, thereby allowing him to use the monies as collateral to finance the purchase of additional estates.⁸⁵

Despite the fiscal benefits he derived from holding the king's recognizances and bonds, de Vere likely was not an enthusiastic supporter of such policies. His biographer, James Ross, deduces that he "is unlikely to have approved of Henry's increasing rapacity, avarice and growing isolation in the last decade of the reign, or, as the most powerful representative of the nobility and one who grew up in rather different political circumstances, Henry's policy of binding many magnates to him by financial constraints."⁸⁶ Such feelings may have come from an unease at being Henry's "executioner" of the fiscal containment policies, which would have isolated him from the peerage and made his company socially unwelcome. There may have been concerns amongst his peers that any large display of wealth or power would draw the king's attention, who may then decide a recognizance was necessary to ensure loyalty. Furthermore, there is little evidence that de Vere sought administrative or executive influence at court in the later portion of Henry's reign, which indicates a desire to maintain physical distance between himself and the Crown due to Henry's recognizance

⁸⁵ Cunningham, "Loyalty and the Usurper," 475.

⁸⁶ Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 146.

policies. Whereas other noblemen, such as Thomas Howard and Edward Buckingham, were frequently present at the king's council or desired to be so, de Vere participated only three times after 1494, whereas he had participated at least thirteen times prior to that date.⁸⁷ This noticeable reduction suggests that he purposely kept his distance from court, likely uncomfortable with his role in the recognizance policies, which were increasingly employed during this period.

Henry's throne was vastly more secure in the later years of his reign. As de Vere's principal proficiency was as a battlefield commander, and as he had secured the Crown against the most substantive military threats, his job was effectively done. Henry did not require a bond from de Vere to ensure his loyalty. The use of de Vere as an agent of his recognizance policies had the same effect of binding him to the regime, as he essentially was limited, by dint of his role, in the social connections available to him. He is known to have entered into just four bonds with the king: two were for the purchase of royal wards and implied only a promise of future payment; one was paid on behalf of Lord Mountjoy and was to guarantee the upkeep of Hammes Castle on the king's behalf; and the final was a relatively insignificant £125 for the surveillance of the countess of Suffolk.⁸⁸ None of these bonds could have restrained de Vere given his immense wealth, nor were they designed to. Just like de Vere's loyalty to him, Henry's trust in de Vere was unassailable, and thus de Vere was solidly in a different category from the rest of the nobility.

⁸⁷ Charles Gerwien Bayne and William Huse Dunham, eds., *Select Cases in the Council of Henry VII* (London: B. Quaritch, 1958), 7–37.

⁸⁸ Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 143.

For de Vere, serving as an agent-administrator of Henry's recognizance policies exempted him from the pressures faced by his noble peers. This further enhanced his relative financial position and power. As he spent less time at court and more time on his estates, he was able to enjoy the comforts afforded him by his unblemished service to the king. His regional domination in East Anglia was unchallenged and kept him on the national stage, though at a distance from the royal court. It is worth noting that, on the rare occasions he did travel to court in the latter years of Henry's reign, he occupied the location in the closest physical proximity to the king, even ahead of the new men. A group of Flemish ambassadors visiting in 1508 referred to de Vere as "the great, and as we are told, the principal personage of this kingdom."⁸⁹ Evidently, his reputation extended beyond England's borders, a testament to his elevated standing despite the growing distance between himself and Henry in the final years of the reign.

How should de Vere be viewed in the context of the shift? Foremost, he was a traditionalist, much akin to the proceeding medieval nobility. He came from an unbroken lineage dating to the twelfth century and exhibited the qualities of the conventional medieval nobleman. He used this status to ingratiate himself into royal favor, rising to become the preeminent member of the nobility and the only one with any real influence on the king.⁹⁰ While his connection with Henry was atypical, it enabled him to operate as his forefathers had done during a period when the institutional nobility largely saw its power sidelined. As the inclusion of the new men shifted the makeup of the English

⁸⁹ Henry died five months later on April 21, 1509 at the age of 52. James Gairdner, ed., *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Reigns of Richard III and Henry VII* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), 371.

⁹⁰ Condon, "Ruling Elites," 121.

government, de Vere represented the old order and convention. Rather than the institutional nobility, his prominence with Henry and their symbiotic relationship acted as a check on unrestrained royal power during the first half of Henry's reign. However, as Henry moved to limit the power of the nobility using bonds and recognizances, de Vere should be viewed as analogous to Henry's new men: he provided the king a service to remain in royal favor, and through that, maintained his status and increased his power relative to other noblemen. In a sense, he personifies and illustrates the shift's theme: the beginning of Henry's reign saw their relationship as a pseudo-arbiter of royal power, while the latter half saw de Vere's role change to a tool of such power. Overall, he was Henry's pivotal point of support. As discussed below, lineage, while important, did not guarantee placement within the king's inner circle. De Vere earned his position because of his unfettered loyalty to the Tudor dynasty, proven to Henry at Bosworth and beyond.

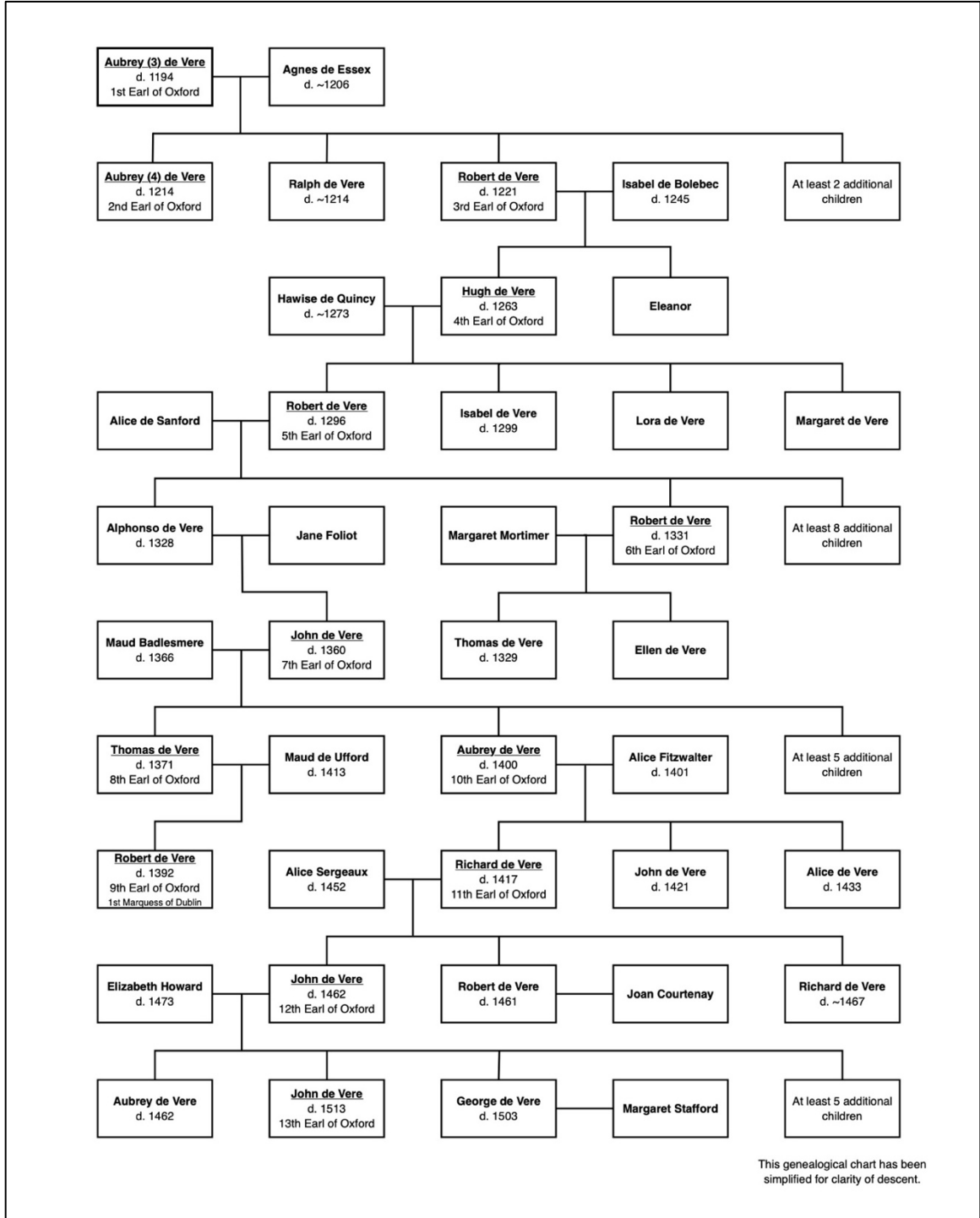


Figure 3. The de Vere Earls of Oxford, 1141–1513.⁹¹

⁹¹ Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 18; George E. Cokayne, Vicary Gibbs, and H. Arthur Doubleday, *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom: Extant, Extinct, or Dormant* (London: St. Catherine’s Press Limited, 1910), *passim*.

Chapter III.

Thomas Howard, First Earl of Surrey

The Battle of Bosworth on August 22, 1485 was an exceptionally bad day for Thomas Howard, first earl of Surrey. As one of Richard III's most prominent and seasoned battlefield commanders, he was near the epicenter of the fighting. Though the battle initially appeared to lean in the Yorkists' favor, by midday the tide changed, and it was clear that Henry Tudor—the upstart, exiled claimant to the throne—would soon carry the field. Exhausted from the intense summer heat and dressed in full battle armor, Howard fought well until, gravely wounded and losing consciousness, he was carried from the field by Henry's men and into uncertain captivity.⁹²

When the sun set that evening, Howard, if cognizant, must have felt that his future prospects were bleak. While the Howard family of Richard's reign had been one of the best-connected, this was due entirely to the recent favor shown them by the House of York. His family's recent ennoblement was the result of faithful service to the de Mowbray dukes of Norfolk stretching back to the 1420s and his father's early approbation to Richard's suspected murderous usurpation of the throne from his nephew Edward V.⁹³ As relative newcomers to the nobility, the Howards lacked the extensive interfamilial connections typical of the upper ranks of the peerage. Figuratively speaking,

⁹² Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 49.

⁹³ Anne Crawford, *Yorkist Lord, John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, c. 1425–1485* (London: Continuum UK, 2010), 111; Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 2.

Howard lost more than anyone other than Richard at Bosworth.⁹⁴ Without any connection to the new regime, through marriage or otherwise, his entire status—including his offices, title, lands, and income—was at Henry’s mercy.⁹⁵

Prior to the fifteenth century, the Howards were a gentry family without notable wealth or distinction. Howard could trace his roots back to his fifth-great-grandfather, Sir William Howard. This senior Howard was a county solicitor during the reign of Edward I who represented Norfolk litigants in the Common Bench before rising to the office of chief justice of the Common Pleas in October 1297.⁹⁶ Sir William married well and established a modest landed estate near King’s Lynn, which placed his family within the ranks of the East Anglian gentry.⁹⁷ Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Sir William’s descendants continued to be reliable, though unremarkable, servants of the Crown, until his third-great-grandson, Robert Howard (Thomas Howard’s grandfather), married Lady Margaret de Mowbray, daughter of Thomas de Mowbray, first duke of Norfolk. It was through this marriage that the Howards moved out of regional royal service and into the retinue of the de Mowbray dukes of Norfolk. Robert Howard was given a place in the household of his new brother-in-law, John de Mowbray, who later became the second duke of Norfolk. After Robert’s death in 1436, his son John Howard

⁹⁴ Crawford, *Yorkist Lord*, 133.

⁹⁵ David M. Head, “Howard, Thomas, second duke of Norfolk,” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed October 30, 2021. <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/13939>.

⁹⁶ Paul Brand, “Howard, Sir William [William of Wighenhall],” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed October 30, 2021. <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/13945>.

⁹⁷ Head, “Howard, Thomas, second duke of Norfolk;” John M. Robinson, *The Dukes of Norfolk: A Quincentennial History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 1–9.

(Thomas Howard's father), continued to reliably serve the de Mowbray family. It was this connection—between John and the de Mowbray dukes—that later elevated the Howards into the nobility after the de Mowbray line passed without male issue.

John Howard's improbable rise into the nobility started when he entered the service of his cousin, John de Mowbray, third duke of Norfolk. For many years, he was an unassuming esquire in the duke's retinue. After proving his steadfastness, and partially due to the familial connection to the de Mowbrays, Duke John elevated Howard's position on his retinue; thereafter, he became one of the duke's most loyal and dedicated senior retainers.⁹⁸ Owing to his fidelity and frequent proximity to the duke, John Howard was pulled into the duke's political orbit. As the Wars of the Roses intensified during Henry VI's reign, Howard joined Duke John when the latter cast his lot with his Yorkist cousin, Edward, earl of March (later Edward IV).⁹⁹ John Howard's son, Thomas (born 1443), reached the age of majority in this context, a world which revolved around the de Mowbray's support alliance of the house of York.

The Wars of the Roses provided John and Thomas Howard with several opportunities to demonstrate their martial abilities and buoy their reputations within Yorkist circles. John Howard served a mostly soldierly role as part of Duke John's retinue and was known to be particularly callous towards his opponents.¹⁰⁰ In 1461, he led a contingent of de Mowbray's men at the bloody Battle of Towton that broke the

⁹⁸ John Ashdown-Hill, *Richard III's 'Beloved Cousyn' John Howard and the House of York* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2009), 16; Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 3–4.

⁹⁹ Charles Ross, *Edward IV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 34.

¹⁰⁰ Crawford, *Yorkist Lord*, pp. 14–18.

dogged Lancastrian line and claimed the field on behalf of Edward.¹⁰¹ He followed this performance by participating in the sieges of Alnwick, Bamburgh, and Dunstanburgh Castles in 1462 and 1463. In 1464, he helped crush Lancastrian rebels in Denbighshire using Duke John's castle of Holt as his base of operations. Later that year, John led his own detachment of troops and fought alongside Edward in the final campaign against Lancastrian holdouts in the North.¹⁰² In each of these engagements, his prowess was impressive and cutthroat. King Edward rewarded him for his service, first knighting him at his coronation ceremony in 1461, then appointing him sheriff for the joint shrievalty of Norfolk and Suffolk. By 1467, John's contemporaries were referring to him as a knight of the king's body. In 1468, he formally left Duke John's service (the fourth duke) and entered the royal household as Edward's appointed treasurer. Finally, in late 1469 or early 1470, the king made Howard the twelfth Baron Mowbray.¹⁰³

John Howard's rapid elevation is significant for two reasons. First, his advancement was due to his service to King Edward rather than Duke John: instead of promoting within the duke's household, John discerningly positioned himself within the king's auspices. Secondly, Thomas Howard indirectly benefited from his father's promotions at court, which set him up for a life of royal service. Though Thomas likely expected that such service would be on behalf of Edward and his heirs, the concept of a life of royal service would serve him well following Henry's ascension. However, in the

¹⁰¹ Anne Crawford, "Howard, John, first duke of Norfolk." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed October 30, 2021. <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/13921>; Christopher Gravett, *Towton 1461: England's Bloodiest Battle* (Oxford: Osprey, 2003), 50, 69–73.

¹⁰² Crawford, "Howard, John."

¹⁰³ Crawford, "Howard, John."

1460s, he was committed to the house of York, and in 1466 he became one of Edward's most intimate and trusted subordinates. The ongoing civil disturbances provided Thomas with many opportunities to serve on the battlefield, which, like his father, he did with ruthless abandon. At the Battle of Barnet in 1471, he suffered multiple injuries that nearly cost him his life, but he recovered well enough to be appointed an esquire of the royal body. Thomas kept himself in close proximity to Edward for the duration of his time at court, though oddly he suddenly resigned his courtly appointments and retired to his manor at Ashwellthorpe in the mid-1470s. For the rest of Edward's reign, Thomas kept to local politics but served the Crown from afar as the sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, the justice of the peace for Norfolk, and a member of the House of Commons for Norfolk.¹⁰⁴

By the time of Edward's unexpected death in 1483, both John and Thomas Howard were firmly established as intimate Yorkists. They were both ennobled by Richard III shortly after he usurped the throne, in what many assume was a reward for their alleged involvement in assassinating Edward V and his younger brother (i.e., the "Princes of the Tower").¹⁰⁵ Two days after seizing the throne, Richard recreated the dukedom of Norfolk—which had reverted back to the Crown after John de Mowbray's death without male issue—and presented it to John Howard. That same day, Thomas

¹⁰⁴ Crawford, "Howard, John;" Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 25.

¹⁰⁵ The rumors of John Howard's involvement in the murder of the Princes of Tower persist to this day. Though it is doubtful that his involvement, if any, will ever be fully ascertained, the circumstantial evidence certainly suggests that he at least connived at the killing of the two young boys. John Ashdown-Hill provides a well-researched discussion of John Howard's potential involvement in his book, *Richard III's 'Beloved Cousyn' John Howard and the House of York*, chapters 14–15. Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 36; Ashdown-Hill, *Richard III's 'Beloved Cousyn'*, 133–136, 138, 159–175.

Howard was made earl of Surrey.¹⁰⁶ In addition to these new titles, Richard bestowed on both men extensive land grants to keep with their newly elevated ranks. As the new duke of Norfolk, John Howard received a sizable portion of the former de Mowbray lands in East Anglia, as well as most of the lands recently forfeited by John de Vere when he fled to the continent. This instantly made John Howard one of the largest landholders in southeast England, even more prodigious than his former de Mowbray employers.¹⁰⁷ Not surprisingly, both John and Thomas Howard remained close allies of Richard during his brief reign, fighting alongside him until his death at Bosworth.

While the details of each man's surrender are unknown, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sources describe the Howards as brave and honorable warriors. Such narratives of chivalric valor in father and son may have been prompted more by Thomas Howard's eventual rehabilitation and service to the Tudor Crown rather than by fact. The most complete source for the events at Bosworth is Hall's *Chronicle*, which states that Duke John fell "lyke a gentleman and a faythefull subiecte to his prince" and "manfully dyed with hym [Richard III] to hys greate fame and lawde."¹⁰⁸ Earl Thomas, it continues,

¹⁰⁶ An interesting side note, the previous title holder for both titles—the duke of Norfolk and the earl of Surrey—was Richard of Shrewsbury, the youngest son of Edward IV and one of the two Princes of the Tower. By awarding his nephew's titles to the Howards, Richard III was effectively admitting both children were dead. Ashdown-Hill, *Richard III's 'Beloved Cousyn'*, 131-132.

¹⁰⁷ John de Mowbray, fourth duke of Norfolk, died unexpectedly on January 14, 1476. At the time of his death, he had only one living child, a daughter, Anne de Mowbray, eighth countess of Norfolk. At the age of five, Anne was married to Edward IV's second son, Richard, duke of York, then four years old. Anne died two years later in 1481 before her husband disappeared along with his brother in the Tower of London (the infamous Princes of the Tower) in 1483. By act of parliament, the rights to her lands were given to her husband, Richard, with reversion to his descendants upon his death, and failing that, to the descendants of his father, Edward IV. As Richard III was the closest descendant of Edward IV following the disappearance of the Princes of the Tower, Anne's lands passed to him, which he passed to John Howard, the first Howard duke of Norfolk in 1483. For more information, see Charles Ross's *Edward IV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), page 248.

¹⁰⁸ Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 419.

though gravely wounded, “submitted hym selfe ther [surrendered], was not taken to grace by cause his father was cheffe cousailer & he greatly familiar with kyng Richard, but comitted to the Tower of London, where he long remained.”¹⁰⁹ These narratives of the Howards’ last moments depict their virtuous actions, contrasting with Hall’s description of Richard’s last moments as violent, and killed as he “worthily had deserued.”¹¹⁰ A revealing detail about Hall’s account is that it places the blame for the Howards’ predicament squarely on Duke John, in a sense absolving Thomas from responsibility. As Hall wrote primarily during the reign of Henry VIII, it is doubtful he would have been overly critical of Earl Thomas. By this time, Thomas Howard had been fully restored, and his labors on behalf of the Crown placed him in strong favor with the king. Thus, it was a safer proposition for Hall to transfer responsibility for Thomas’ Yorkist support to his dead father, who was presented as the force behind the family’s service to Richard.

Similar to Hall’s, John Beaumont’s account of the Howards’ defeat at Bosworth places the blame for their situation on John Howard’s attachment to Richard, and he comparably vindicates Thomas as a committed Yorkist. In the Beaumont narrative, Earl Thomas, after witnessing his father’s death by the earl of Oxford, immediately surrenders to Sir Gilbert Talbot and demands that Talbot kill him. Talbot nobly refuses, since Earl Thomas’s circumstances were due to his “fathers fault ... [who] preferr’d A Tyrants crowne before the iuster side.”¹¹¹ The significance of these accounts—Hall’s and

¹⁰⁹ Hall, 419.

¹¹⁰ Hall, 420.

¹¹¹ John Beaumont, “Bosworth Field,” In *Bosworth-Field: With a Taste of the Variety of Other Poems, Left by Sir John Beaumont ... Set Forth by His Sonne, Sir Iohn Beaumont ... and Dedicated to the Kings most Excellent Maiestie; Bosworth-Field, with a Taste of the Variety of Other Poems, Left by Sir John Beaumont ... Set Forth by His Sonne, Sir Iohn Beaumont ... and Dedicated to the Kings most*

Beaumont's—is that they excuse Thomas for taking arms against Henry Tudor. More profoundly, they offer an illustration of how Henry viewed Howard: as a man for whom loyal service trumped personal gain. If Howard could set aside his sentiments and fight for a tyrant like Richard, what was he capable of if he served a virtuous man like Henry? Since Howard had fought against Henry, amends would have to be made; he would have to prove himself worthy to be restored to his previous rank. Still, Hall's and Beaumont's accounts characterize the basis of Henry's and Howard's relationship: royal favor exchanged for capable service. Howard was attainted for his opposition at Bosworth; therefore, his recent ennoblement from 1483 was removed.¹¹² However, if he could avail his talents to serve the newly established Tudor Crown, then he could likely be restored to his previous noble rank and forgiven for his transgressions while following in his father's footsteps.

Howard was a talented man with little to his name and was therefore entirely dependent on the king's favor for his standing, but this hardly made him unique. In a sense, his situation paralleled Henry's new men, giving him a unique hybrid identity between the nobility and the ascending new governing class. Steven Gunn defined this group of political operatives as an amalgamation of upwardly mobile gentlemen—administrators, made up mostly of gentry, lawyers, clerics, merchants, and townsmen, men who Gunn says “hitched their stars to the service of the Crown rather than to that of

Excellent Maiestie (London, 1629), <http://search.proquest.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/books/bosworth-field/docview/2148059356/se-2?accountid=11311>.

¹¹² Given-Wilson, et al., “Henry VII: November 1485, Part 1.”

noble magnates.”¹¹³ Put more succinctly, these men made up the educated and trained “new aristocracy”: professionals who entered royal service and owed the entirety of their livelihoods to the king’s favor, which they received when they delivered tangible results. From a broad perspective, Howard’s circumstances were analogous to Gunn’s definition of the new men. However, while Howard’s situation paralleled that of the new men, he was not a “new man” under Gunn’s definition. Due to his elevation in 1483, he was noble, despite the shortness of time. Moreover, while his attainder stripped him of his rank and placed him beneath the nobility, he at least had the potential to be restored if he obtained the king’s favor. Thus, Howard was more akin to a royal *servant* than a conventional old noble, but his prior rank placed him above the new men in social rank.

Reflecting on this hybrid identity, Howard carried out the conventional roles expected of him in uniquely different ways. Whereas de Vere’s standing within the regime permitted him to *continue* doing what the nobility had always done, Howard had to adapt himself because of his past Yorkist affiliation and Henry’s suspicions of him. His most demonstrable adaptation was his physical remoteness from court. In an age where nearness enhanced a nobleman’s power and prestige, Howard’s status required distance from the king’s person. This detachment from court was a mutual accommodation; both he and the king benefited from his posting in the North.¹¹⁴ Henry needed a royal servant akin to the new men: someone with military and administrative experience to protect his northern flanks following the untimely murder of his previous

¹¹³ Steven Gunn, “Henry VII in Context: Problems and Possibilities,” *History* 92, no. 307 (2007): 301–317. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-229X.2007.00397>.

¹¹⁴ Lander, *Crown and Nobility*, 35.

northern custodian, Henry Percy, fourth earl of Northumberland, in April 1489. Howard had the requisite skills to fill this role and thereby earn a full restoration.¹¹⁵ As Jack Lander wrote in his work on the period's nobility, Henry's reign is characterized by the nobility's alignment to the Crown based on self-interest and the "service in exchange for good favor" model, illustrated by Thomas Howard.¹¹⁶

Howard the Lieutenant

Like most men of his rank and of the period, Howard was well acquainted with the sword. His military past made him a likely candidate for rehabilitation, particularly as Henry needed experienced military leadership to suppress opposition to his rule. The English North largely opposed the new king, and disaffected Yorkists there launched numerous rebellions and insurrections.¹¹⁷ The first major uprising, the Stafford and Lovell Rebellion in April 1486, aimed to restore the House of York before Henry could cement his throne. Though easily crushed, it signaled that the region would be an ongoing source of resistance.¹¹⁸ Francis Lord Lovell, one of the uprising's key ringleaders,

¹¹⁵ Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 53.

¹¹⁶ Lander, *Crown and Nobility*, 3.

¹¹⁷ Cunningham, *Henry VII*, 54.

¹¹⁸ Of the two instigators of the rebellion, one—Humphrey Stafford—was captured while the other—Francis Lord Lovell—escaped. Stafford was arrested while in sanctuary in the village church at Culham, forcibly removed from the abbey by an agent of the king and approximately sixty of his retainers. This led to various court cases to determine the limits of the king's reach for those seeking sanctuary and what the physical bounds of the Church protected. For more information on how this particular case contributed to the development of the Tudor state, see C. H. Williams' article "The Rebellion of Humphrey Stafford in 1486" in *The English Historical Review*. C. H. Williams, "The Rebellion of Humphrey Stafford in 1486," *The English Historical Review* 43, no. 170 (1928): 181.

escaped capture and later incited the large Simnel's Rebellion.¹¹⁹ The effect of these uprisings was to confirm to Henry that he would never be secure until he controlled the North. For this, he required an experienced military tactician who understood the Yorkists—he needed Howard.



Figure 4. Thomas Howard.¹²⁰

In the background of these domestic Northern disturbances were the Scots. England's dynastic conflicts during the Wars of the Roses and Henry's ascensional difficulties distracted the English from securing their northern border, which left it vulnerable to Scottish ambitions. Both James III and his son James IV of Scotland

¹¹⁹ John A. Wagner, *Encyclopedia of the Wars of the Roses* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 152.

¹²⁰ "Thomas Howard, 2nd Duke of Norfolk," UK National Portrait Gallery, accessed January 18, 2022, <https://npgimages.com/search/?searchQuery=D38987>.

pursued antagonistic policies towards their southern neighbor, and both probed the borderlands for opportunities to expand Scottish sovereignty, control, and regional domination.¹²¹ Henry's focus on securing his throne rendered him unable to personally mount a defense. Instead, he relied on the support of the Northern English aristocracy as a temporary fix. In the past, many noblemen in the North had used their distance from Westminster and their nearness to the Scottish borderlands to assert a degree of autonomy as a check to the English king's power, which disproportionately enhanced their power in relation to the Crown. Naturally, Henry was unwilling to concede any of his newly won power to distant Northern families. Instead, he relied on his stepfather, Thomas Stanley, referred to as the king's "right dearly beloved father," and Thomas's brother to deter Scottish aggression.¹²² The Stanleys controlled the largest private military force in the North, and as Richard III could have testified at Bosworth, their collaboration—or noncooperation—could turn the tide of a military engagement. For now, they lent their support to Henry and mobilized their forces in his defense. This resulted in a truce with the Scots, though the situation was unstable.¹²³ It was apparent to Henry that he was overly dependent on the Stanleys' volatile support. He needed his own man—just as the Stanleys withheld support from Richard that led to his downfall, they could similarly

¹²¹ Norman Macdougall, "James III," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed January 27, 2022, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/14589>; Trevor Chalmers, "James IV," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed January 27, 2022, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/14590>.

¹²² Michael J. Bennett, "Stanley, Thomas, first earl of Derby," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed September 9, 2021, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/26279>.

¹²³ Bennett, "Stanley, Thomas, first earl of Derby;" R. S. Thomas, "Tudor, Jasper [Jasper of Hatfield], duke of Bedford," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed September 9, 2021, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/27796>; Bennett, "Stanley, Thomas."

menace Henry. Despite Thomas Stanley's marriage to the king's mother, the situation in the North remained too great a risk for Henry.

In the face of the Yorkist and Scottish challenges, Henry accelerated the integration of malleable Yorkists into his regime, particularly those who had significant political, financial, and military resources. The principal benefactor of this strategy was Thomas Howard. Since his incarceration in the Tower, he eagerly desired rehabilitation and restoration to his former rank.¹²⁴ Henry slowly mollified his attitude towards him. In March 1486, the king pardoned Howard for "all treasons and felonies" stemming from his Yorkist service at Bosworth.¹²⁵ This technically opened the door for Howard's restoration, but the pardon's limited scope indicates that Henry did not fully trust him. Sensibly, the king merely forgave Howard for his "treason"; notably, he was not granted his liberty, nor was his attainder reversed.

In order to secure his release and full restoration, Howard knew he had to be seen as both a virtuous and a loyal subject of the new king. A story emerged, likely propagated by Howard himself, alleging that the king's lieutenant of the Tower offered him an opportunity to escape during the distracting early days of Simnel's Rebellion. Howard, the account states, staunchly refused the lieutenant's offer and thereafter vowed to avoid contact with anyone suspected of disloyalty or who had the semblance of impropriety, since his fidelity lay firmly with Henry.¹²⁶ Such a tale is unlikely to be corroborated, but

¹²⁴ Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 51.

¹²⁵ Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 51; Public Record Office, *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry VII, vol I*, 86.

¹²⁶ Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 52; David M. Head, *The Ebbs and Flows of Fortune: The Life of Thomas Howard, Third Duke of Norfolk* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 18–19; Head, "Howard, Thomas, second duke of Norfolk."

it offers valuable insight into the importance of the *appearance* of loyalty as a *sine qua non* for political viability. Howard often promoted this story, which shows his awareness of the need to *appear* loyal: in this case, he was offered “the keys to the castle,” yet he deferentially acted in the king’s interest rather than his own.¹²⁷ In a sense, he set himself up as the ideal candidate for restoration by presenting himself as both loyal and honorable. Plus, he had the advantageous distinction of being one of the most experienced soldiers just as Henry’s Crown needed such men most.

Howard’s strategy eventually paid off, at least in part. In 1489, Henry released him from prison and restored his earldom.¹²⁸ However, the king did not restore Howard’s ducal title, which he should have inherited following his father’s death, nor did Henry restore his lands in East Anglia, which he instead gave to de Vere as another reward for loyal service. Therefore, even though Howard was a noble again, he lacked the comital income essential to support his restored rank. This turnabout left him with only one viable option: royal service.¹²⁹ Howard’s restoration was a tactical move by Henry. That is, he needed a man with Howard’s military and administrative experience to secure the North, but he dared not risk Howard betraying him and using such experience to lead a revolt; it had only been three years since Bosworth, and Yorkist plots still abounded. By withholding his lands, Henry made Howard entirely dependent on royal offices and their fees to maintain the lifestyle his rank required. This effectively deprived Howard of external influence and of the ability to underwrite an insurrection. Henry’s partial

¹²⁷ Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 52.

¹²⁸ Lander, *Crown and Nobility*, 275.

¹²⁹ Lander, 275.

restoration also suggests the prospect of a future return of Howard's family's lands and profits. Henry hoped that this would make him see loyalty as a more profitable route than rebellion. In the broader context, the king's actions placed Howard in a situation akin to that of the new men: dependent on favor for rank and livelihood, or as articulated by Lander, "service in exchange for good favor."

The partially restored Howard had his first opportunity to serve Henry and demonstrate his realignment to the regime shortly after his release from the Tower in 1489. Unsurprisingly, rebellion broke out again in Yorkshire, and Henry sent his new servant northward with the vanguard of the royal army to quell the spreading discontent.¹³⁰ This assignment was significant for several reasons. First, it shows Howard utilizing the leadership role for which he was released, which suggests that the king released him for his martial abilities and was prepared to *partially* trust him as long as Howard could subdue the North.

Second, this undertaking placed Howard in command over notoriously loyal Henricians. These included men such as George Talbot, the earl of Shrewsbury, who had distinguished himself at the Battle of Stoke; his step-uncle Sir William Stanley, whose intercession at Bosworth sealed Henry's victory; and Sir Rhys ap Thomas, one of the first to defect to Henry's army following his landing in Wales in 1485. These men were attached to Howard's vanguard to surveil him.¹³¹ Had Howard betrayed the king, they would have been in a position to mitigate any potential fallout.

¹³⁰ Michael J. Bennet, "Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489," *The English Historical Review* 105, no. 414 (1990): 41, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/570473>; Head, "Howard, Thomas, second duke of Norfolk;" Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 53–54.

¹³¹ Claiden-Yardley, 54.

Third, though his restoration permitted him a degree of nearness to the king's person, his prompt assignment northward was designed to keep him away from court and his former lands in East Anglia. Though this certainly boosted de Vere's reputation in the North, there is no evidence it was directed or requested by him. Howard's posting in the region was a sort of banishment under the guise of service that signaled the king's wariness at having him too close to court. On the other hand, this particular expedition provided him the chance to prove that his martial abilities had not diminished during his imprisonment, and he quelled the rebellion before Henry arrived with the bulk of the royal army. *The Great Chronicle of London*, though interestingly not Vergil, credits Howard as the man responsible for the rebel's dispersal.¹³² Vergil, as the Tudors' main historian, may have been wary of bestowing too much praise upon Howard and instead credited the king. Howard was, after all, still tainted by his previous Ricardian affiliation.

Regardless of the account, this episode was a triumphant moment for both Henry and Howard. For the king, Howard had more firmly entrenched Tudor authority in the cantankerous North. Howard, meanwhile, proved himself worthy of additional assignments. Shortly after Henry's arrival in Yorkshire, he delegated to Howard the running of a commission of oyer and terminer to investigate and try the rebel leaders. This was another stepping stone in Howard's path to his eventual promotion as the king's lieutenant in the North.¹³³ The death of Henry Percy, Henry's former guardian of the North, left a power vacuum in Yorkshire, which Vergil blamed for the uprising's rapid

¹³² A. H. Thomas and Isobel Thornley, eds., *The Great Chronicle of London* (London: Printed by George W. Jones, 1938), 242; Polydore Vergil, *The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil, A.D. 1485–1537*, ed. by Denys Hay (London: Royal Historical Society, 1950), 39.

¹³³ A. F. Pollard, *The Reign of Henry VII from Contemporary Sources* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1913), 81; Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 54.

spread.¹³⁴ Having shown his propensity in military affairs and demonstrated his realigned loyalties, and being that he was a nobleman wholly dependent on the Crown's favor, Howard was a natural replacement. His appointment as deputy warden (the two-and-a-half-year-old Prince Arthur was the king's warden in title) suited both him and the king well: Henry had his authority restored in the North, and Howard obtained a profitable royal office with an annual fee of £1,000.¹³⁵ This allowed him to finally establish an appropriate household for his rank, but it was insufficient to build a large affinity of supporters loyal to him over the king.

Had he been a man of the gentry, Howard may have been regarded as one of Henry's new men. He fit the mold: he was skilled and dependent on the king's favor for his position. However, he was technically a member of the nobility and thus a hybrid of the two social groups. His service to the Tudor Crown begot additional responsibilities and offices for him. Henry relied on his experience as an able diplomat and battlefield tactician, both sorely needed due to the growing number of raids from Scotland. Henry also tasked Howard to protect his rights in the forests north of the River Trent as Commissioner of the Peace, and he appointed Howard as the royal steward of the king's manors in Yorkshire.¹³⁶ These additional posts cultivated favor with the Crown, and they funded his increasingly lavish lifestyle.

¹³⁴ Steven G. Ellis, "Percy, Henry, fourth earl of Northumberland," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/21935>; Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, 39.

¹³⁵ Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 54.

¹³⁶ Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 54.

Howard carried out his duties and strove to maintain the peace in the North.¹³⁷ In 1492, a minor insurrection broke out in Ackworth in the western regions of Yorkshire. Although the rebellion proved small, at its onset it had the potential to become a large-scale revolt. Accordingly, Howard took action to suppress the disturbances using the limited prerogatives bestowed by his office. As deputy warden, he was entitled to muster an army when necessary to defend the king's interests. However, in practice, the raising of armies in Yorkshire during this period was done only under specific commissions issued by the Crown. The risks of rebellion and misappropriation were too great for Henry to devolve power over remote areas of his kingdom.¹³⁸ For Howard, his constraint was a reminder that, while noble, he was foremost a royal servant who lacked certain independent powers afforded to noblemen such as de Vere. His power came from, and was moderated by, the king. While this does not mean he was sidelined per se, it is another illustration of the adaptation he made as a "new man" dressed as a nobleman.

While limited in the powers he could deploy independently, he was able to effect control over the North, as demonstrated in his handling of the aftermath of the Ackworth rebellion. He used his influence over the king to secure pardons for the minor footmen who made up the bulk of the insurgent forces. This had the advantageous effect of winning for Henry "the favour of the Countrey" and soothed tensions.¹³⁹ Howard, a savvy politician with a Yorkist pedigree, saw the benefits of maintaining a tranquil relationship between the North and the Crown. As Michael Bennett described, the North

¹³⁷ Bennet, "Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489," 48.

¹³⁸ Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 55.

¹³⁹ Pollard, *Reign of Henry VII*, 81.

had in Howard “a lord of sufficient stature and reputation ... [who rose] above local factionalism to mediate effectively between the region and the Crown.”¹⁴⁰ Henry, in turn, had in Howard a man loyal to the regime who effectuated his authority and broadened his political base to serve this end. It is difficult to imagine another man of Howard’s abilities who had the aptitude to amalgamate such opposing factions. But Howard succeeded, eventually earning himself the complete restoration of his lands.

Despite his pacification of the North and his displays of fidelity, Henry pursued a dichotomic approach to Howard. Between 1490 and 1492, he restored to Howard the bulk of his father’s lands in East Anglia, albeit incrementally. The manner of his restoration suggests that Henry held Howard in measured esteem—that while Howard had masterfully crushed several uprisings in the king’s name and extended his authority northward, Henry still viewed him with suspicion and wanted to encourage good behavior and additional service. While many of his lands were returned, Howard was denied physical entry such that they had to be managed from afar, again suggesting that Henry still harbored some doubt about him.¹⁴¹ In 1492, Henry participated in a military expedition against the French town of Boulogne, an operation that would have benefited greatly from Howard’s military experience. Incredibly, he refused to recall Howard to join him. Instead, he commanded Howard remain in Yorkshire far from the action, despite Howard’s restoration meaning he was indentured to attend Henry in such matters.¹⁴² In a period when power emanated from proximity to the king, this example

¹⁴⁰ Bennet, “Henry VII and the Northern Rising of 1489,” 48.

¹⁴¹ Head, *The Ebbs and Flows of Fortune*, 19.

¹⁴² Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 53.

conveys the impression that Howard remained an outsider despite his efforts.

Nevertheless, he resourcefully profited from his “isolation” by developing relationships with the Northern polity. Such connections proved invaluable when he later drew upon them to support his efforts during subsequent feuds with the Scots. However, in 1492, he was convinced of his constrained status as a nobleman on the periphery of, and dependent on, royal favor.

The Perkin Warbeck conspiracy was the most significant challenge to Henry’s kingship, and Howard’s response illustrates the success of his adaptive behavior: at the end of the affair, he was finally brought into the king’s inner circle. The conspiracy was another effort to depose Henry, this one seeking to replace him with “Richard of Shrewsbury, duke of York”—Edward IV’s second son and one of the so-called “Princes in the Tower.” In actuality, “Richard of Shrewsbury” was the pretender, Perkin Warbeck. The real Richard of Shrewsbury was long dead. What made this conspiracy so formidable was its broad base of international support. Margaret of York (also called Margaret of Burgundy), Edward IV’s sister and Richard of Shrewsbury’s aunt, claimed Warbeck was her missing nephew and the rightful claimant to the English throne. Her backing greatly elevated his following. Even Henry’s step-uncle and the chamberlain of the royal household, Sir William Stanley (Thomas Stanley’s brother), threw his lot in with the conspiracy, as did the Holy Roman Emperor.¹⁴³ While each defection compounded Henry’s difficulties, none was as consequential as that of James IV of Scotland. His support of Warbeck brought scores of cross-border incursions, which were only held

¹⁴³ Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 53.

back by Howard's ongoing military stratagems. If there was ever a context for Henry to bring Howard in from the cold, Warbeck's conspiracy was it.

As Henry's leading Northern servant, Howard had the duty to nullify James's support for Warbeck. Six months prior to Warbeck's arrival in Scotland, Henry commissioned Howard to negotiate the betrothal of his eldest daughter, Margaret Tudor, to the Scottish king.¹⁴⁴ In theory, such a union would stabilize England's border and allow Henry to focus on the continent, where opponents continued to stir up trouble. Unfortunately, substantive negotiations did not begin until May 5, 1496, shortly after which Warbeck had been received at James's court as "King Richard IV" and had married the Scottish noblewoman Lady Catherine Gordon.¹⁴⁵ Such an advancement in Warbeck's status doomed Howard's mission before it began, for he had little room in which to negotiate if James—at least *officially*—did not recognize Henry as king. The English made a resilient effort: twice in 1496 Henry renewed Howard's commission to negotiate, and twice Howard was unable to secure Margaret's marriage. Nonetheless, it is clear from both sides' war preparations that neither held much hope for a peaceful settlement. The potential gains a Warbeck usurpation would yield for Scotland were too great for James to ignore.

The English North, with its entrenched anti-Scottish inclinations, was a foolish place for Warbeck to instigate a rebellion. When he and the Scottish king crossed the frontier on September 21, 1496, they did so under the colors of Scotland and Yorkist

¹⁴⁴ Claiden-Yardley, 197.

¹⁴⁵ Richard Glen Eaves, "Margaret [Margaret Tudor]," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/18052>.

England.¹⁴⁶ In Northern eyes, this equated Warbeck more with the hated Scots than a champion of the Yorkist cause. Howard capitalized on Warbeck's careless display of Scottish alignment and mustered a strong contingent of Northern soldiers to counter the invasion. Many disaffected Yorkists, not yet reconciled to the Tudor Crown, could nonetheless not stomach aligning themselves to England's traditional nemesis, even to depose Henry, and thus resolved to fight under Howard's leadership.¹⁴⁷ James and Warbeck anticipated that their invasion would be met with broad support and that their numbers would swell, thereby not stressing the Scottish treasury too much. However, no large-scale popular support materialized. They soon received word that Howard was moving towards them with a force of 20,000 well-armed Northern soldiers. Seeing the situation deteriorating, James made a sudden retreat back into Scotland, carrying many spoils lifted from the English countryside.¹⁴⁸ Howard arrived soon thereafter and relieved the beleaguered border positions while preparing hasty defenses in case the Scots reappeared. After securing the frontier, Howard crossed into Scotland and pursued both James and Warbeck. Unable to draw Scottish forces into a decisive battle and unprepared for a drawn-out campaign, he instead pillaged the Scottish border regions then returned to England to prepare for a larger, more devastating invasion.¹⁴⁹

By January 1497, Howard was prepared. Henry had entrusted him with extensive resources to carry the war deep into Scotland.¹⁵⁰ The Scottish and Warbeck invasion had

¹⁴⁶ Arthurson, *Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy*, 213.

¹⁴⁷ Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, 99-101; Arthurson, *Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy*, 219.

¹⁴⁸ Temperley, *Henry 7*, 153-154.

¹⁴⁹ Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, 101.

¹⁵⁰ Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, 91.

shown how unprepared the English North had been, so Henry dispatched £30,000 to Howard's personal treasury to pay for additional men and provisions.¹⁵¹ The largess of this sum is apparent when one considers that it amounted to over five times James's annual revenue.¹⁵² Henry's move raises the following question: considering the unfavorable diplomatic conditions that preceded the September invasion, why had he not better prepared the North? According to Vergil, Henry feared that a strategically timed Northern rebellion would side with the invaders, and any supplies he sent would be lost. Vergil described the king's angst, writing that he "was greatly afraid, since he feared not only the enemy but also his own nobles—lest the nobility of the area, either in error or because tainted with treachery, would go over."¹⁵³ Such fears had some rational basis. While Vergil does not identify Howard as a potential double-crosser, his prominence in the North must have made Henry consider that possibility. However, Howard's repulse of the invasion allayed the king's fears, and Henry finally sent the necessary monies and provisions to Howard. By comparison, it is difficult to picture Henry treating de Vere in the same incrementalistic manner as he did Howard, which itself illustrates Howard's stature as peripheral to the king's circle. Yet, Howard remained loyal and committed, eventually forcing James IV to parlay. The resulting Truce of Ayton was the first major peace accord between England and Scotland since 1328. Henry rewarded Howard's achievements by recalling him to court in 1499, effectively ending his internal "exile."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Arthurson, *Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy*, 229.

¹⁵² Arthurson, *Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy*, 227.

¹⁵³ Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, 89.

¹⁵⁴ Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 60-61; Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 90-91.

Howard the Courtier

Upon his return to the royal court, Howard integrated himself into the king's retinue. Francis Bacon commented on situations where talented nobles were promoted into grand offices, saying that kings who "have able men of their nobility shall find ease in employing them, and a better slide into their business, for people naturally bend to them, as born in some sort to command."¹⁵⁵ Bacon's assessment applies to Howard's circumstances quite well: following his posting in the North—where Henry affirmed his abilities and loyalties from afar—Howard was "promoted" to more courtly appointments near the king's person. Henry's utilization of Howard at court was done in much the same manner as Steven Gunn's so-called "new men"; having competently handled his duties in the North, thus justifying the king's faith in him, he slipped into the routine associated with those royal councilors who followed the king about the English countryside dispensing advice and participating in both policy making and administrative work.¹⁵⁶ Howard's provision of such services again shows his adaptation to his unique dichotomy between the nobility (in rank) and the new men (in complete dependence on the king's favor). Whereas most members of the nobility, similar to de Vere, held office as a means to enhance their prestige owed by their lineage, Howard held his offices for profit, wholly reliant on the king's bounty for his subsistence.

Within two years of his return to court, Henry appointed Howard the kingdom's Lord Treasurer, a highly conspicuous post that allowed Howard the opportunity to utilize

¹⁵⁵ Francis Bacon, *Essays, Advancement of Learning, New Atlantis, and Other Pieces*, ed. Richard Foster Jones (New York: Odyssey Press, 1937), 39.

¹⁵⁶ Melvin Jay Tucker, *The Life of Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey and Second Duke of Norfolk, 1443–1524* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1964), 75.

more of his administrative abilities.¹⁵⁷ Though Henry ran his finances through his household treasurer rather than the exchequer, which made the Lord Treasurer's office less influential than under previous kings, it was still one of the three "great offices" (along with the Lord Chancellor and the Lord of the Privy Seal), and it accorded Howard a seat on the royal council.¹⁵⁸ His installment was a clear statement of Henry's growing regard for him. As Lord Treasurer, he was reportedly placid, diligent, and servile, all of which departed from the usual ostentatious displays of the office's trappings shown by previous holders.¹⁵⁹ However, he did use the frills afforded him to further benefit his overall station—he just did so more discreetly. The increased access, greater influence, additional income, and ability to patronize his own factions gave him the means to elevate his most trusted servants into regional county offices in his native East Anglia.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, as he had complete freedom to appoint those of his choosing within his own bureau, he installed his supporters throughout—men such as his secretary Henry Everard—which enhanced his political leverage within the regime.¹⁶¹ His appointments in both the royal government and regional county offices show that he used the prerogatives of his position to expand his sway and influence within government administratively, as expected of men of his station. He may never have had a close

¹⁵⁷ Tucker, 75.

¹⁵⁸ Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 62.

¹⁵⁹ Tucker, *The Life of Thomas Howard*, 76.

¹⁶⁰ Cunningham, *Henry VII*, 167-168.

¹⁶¹ Melvin Jay Tucker, "The Life of Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey and Second Duke of Norfolk, 1443-1524" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1962), 83.

relationship with the king like de Vere, but he could certainly take advantage of his position to elevate and secure himself.

Should Howard's appointment of his supporters be seen as corruption? Howard biographer Kirsten Claiden-Yardley argued that it "should not be seen as corruption; rather it is how office-holding ... was expected to work."¹⁶² In a sense, the office of Lord Treasurer offered him the latitude akin to the landed "fiefdoms" of the kingdom's large landholders, the difference being that while members of the nobility—for example, de Vere—focused on inserting their supporters into local offices to enhance and maintain their regional authority, Howard instead focused on filling posts within the royal administrative apparatus to enhance his overall influence. His appointment as Lord Treasurer provided him an unfettered ability to spread his authority throughout the royal government, and move closer to the center of Tudor politics. Rather than corruption, this was the exercise of the full power of his appointment, as would be expected of any nobleman in his position. As quickly as Howard was restored, Henry could remove him. Francis Bacon wrote that few men loved Henry, some feared him, and nearly all revered him.¹⁶³ It is difficult to determine precisely into what category Howard fell, but the fact that he experienced attainder, was sent North, and was finally permitted back to court suggests there was a tepid fear of the king. Howard was incrementally restored, but it is doubtful he would have gambled his full restoration on potentially corrupt behaviors.

Not only did Howard serve as Henry's treasurer, but he also was one of Henry's foremost diplomats. Given that no residential diplomatic corps existed during this period,

¹⁶² Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 62.

¹⁶³ Tucker, *The Life of Thomas Howard*, 76.

the usual practice was to select knowledgeable and well-connected men from the king's council and appoint them to conduct specific diplomatic missions. This is how Howard was charged with negotiating the marriage of the king's daughter to the Scottish king; and once assigned with a specific mission, it typically stayed with the diplomat until its conclusion. As one of Henry's great officers, such commissions often fell upon Howard.¹⁶⁴ This was due to his skill, but it was also due to the combination of his rank and his position as one of Henry's most familiar councilors. Howard, along with Morton, Alcock, Fox, Lovell, Empson, Dudley, Dynham, and Somerset made up the bulk of Henry's post-1501 council. With the exception of Howard, no other great nobleman consistently sat on the council, meaning his fellow members ranked beneath him socially.¹⁶⁵ This made Howard the only suitable candidate for negotiating when rank played a consideration, and accordingly, he was frequently engaged in diplomacy.

As Henry did not go to war often, the majority of Howard's diplomatic efforts focused on securing marriages between the king's children and the leading European dynasties. Securing marital connections with Europe's ruling houses was essential to legitimizing the Tudor dynasty. Since he had ascended the throne by right of conquest rather than by blood, connubial connections offered the quickest, most profitable way to validate his ascension. Henry was aware of the importance of a good marriage. His own wedding to Elizabeth of York in 1486 unified the houses of York and Lancaster. In much the same way, he desired that the marriage of his eldest son, Arthur, to Ferdinand and

¹⁶⁴ Steven Gunn, *Early Tudor Government 1485–1558* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 42.

¹⁶⁵ Tucker, *The Life of Thomas Howard*, 77.

Isabella's eldest daughter, Catherine of Aragon, would create an Anglo-Spanish alliance capable of severing Scotland's ties to France and neutralizing the threat to the North. Howard was heavily involved in negotiating the final details of Arthur's marriage, and he was part of the entourage that met Catherine's caravan at Amesbury as she progressed from Plymouth to London in October 1501.¹⁶⁶ He attended their wedding at St. Paul's on November 14, 1501. It was an imposing affair, as Henry sought public approbation for his dynasty and the eventual peaceful succession.¹⁶⁷ Unfortunately, Arthur died within five months of his wedding, and it was Howard's unhappy duty to travel to the prince's residence at Ludlow to participate in his funeral rites as chief mourner for the king.¹⁶⁸

Before the tragic end to Arthur's marriage to Catherine, Henry turned his attention towards solidifying the Anglo-Scottish truce by marrying his eldest daughter, Margaret, to James IV of Scotland. Both sides had conceived of this union during the negotiations for the 1497 Truce of Ayton, but Henry terminated discussions until James cut ties with Warbeck. By November 1502, terms had been re-established, and most arrangements for the marriage had been concluded. Henry charged Howard with finalizing the last details and ensuring the ratification of the treaty.¹⁶⁹ As during the Ayton truce negotiations, he was ideally suited to this commission. He was, after all, the only nobleman on the king's council, and he was proficient at negotiating with the Scots.

¹⁶⁶ Cunningham, *Prince Arthur*, 125.

¹⁶⁷ Garrett Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1941), 34-35; Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 62; Cunningham, 125.

¹⁶⁸ Cunningham, 180.

¹⁶⁹ Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 65; Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 284.

By the terms of the final agreement, Margaret was to be brought to Scotland by September 1, 1503, with the marriage taking place within fifteen days.¹⁷⁰

In a further illustration of Howard's incremental restoration into royal favor, he was accorded the signal honor of acting as the chief commissioner to deliver Margaret to James's court in Edinburgh.¹⁷¹ This was perhaps his most public diplomatic role on the king's behalf. Dressed in his finest clothes, he led a large, impressive procession through the English North to the Scottish border. This delegation was, in essence, the court of the soon-to-be Scottish queen, and its regality reflected not only *her* status but also that of her chief escort, Howard. Trumpeters, musicians, county sheriffs, aldermen, and town burgesses heartily greeted the procession with celebrations as it moved northward, the grandest of which occurred in York where Howard had spent many years based as the king's lieutenant.¹⁷² On August 1, 1503, Howard and Margaret crossed into Scotland, where they were met by representatives of the Scottish king who escorted them to Dalkeith Castle outside Edinburgh. Margaret and James were formally married a week later, with Howard adorned in a long gown of gold cloth with a gilded collar of the Order of the Garter.¹⁷³ While all eyes were focused on the royal couple, Howard also would have been an intentionally impressive sight near the altar.

The remaining years of Henry's reign were relatively quotidian when compared to the 1480s and 1490s. Howard continued in royal service, as it provided him his livelihood

¹⁷⁰ Tucker, *The Life of Thomas Howard*, 86.

¹⁷¹ Tucker, 86.

¹⁷² Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, 66.

¹⁷³ Claiden-Yardley, 66.

and guaranteed his privileged position. After returning to court in 1499, he received the East Anglian manor of Tendring Hall from Henry—the ancestral dwelling of the de Mowbray dukes of Norfolk—as his primary residence. While he was not the leading nobleman in East Anglia—that designation belonged to de Vere—he became one of its most powerful. Distinctly, however, his position was not due to pedigree but rather royal support and advancement. Reflecting upon his dependence on royal favor for his continued power and prestige, Howard was like the non-noble new men such as Reynold Bray, Edmund Dudley, Richard Empson, or Thomas Lovell, and represented the beginnings of the servitude and the steady demilitarization of the nobility that became the hallmark of the Tudor dynasty.¹⁷⁴

However, while Steven Gunn and others have identified these new men, and the gentry from which they arose, as central to the political transformation of Tudor England, it is essential to acknowledge the critical importance of figures such as Howard, who straddled both the “service economy” of the new men and the “prestige economy” of the nobility. Howard was a member of the nobility as heir to the dukedom of Norfolk under Richard III (and was later restored to it by Henry VII’s eponymous heir); at the same time, he owed his status to his abilities and service to the Crown, not his bloodline. The accession of Henry VIII in 1509 further emphasizes this point: by again taking care to accommodate the new king’s wishes, and by smoothing his transition to the throne, Howard ensured the continuation of his own ennobled and royal servant status, as well as the assumption thereof by his son upon his death in 1524.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, 43.

¹⁷⁵ Head, *The Ebbs and Flows of Fortune*, 25.

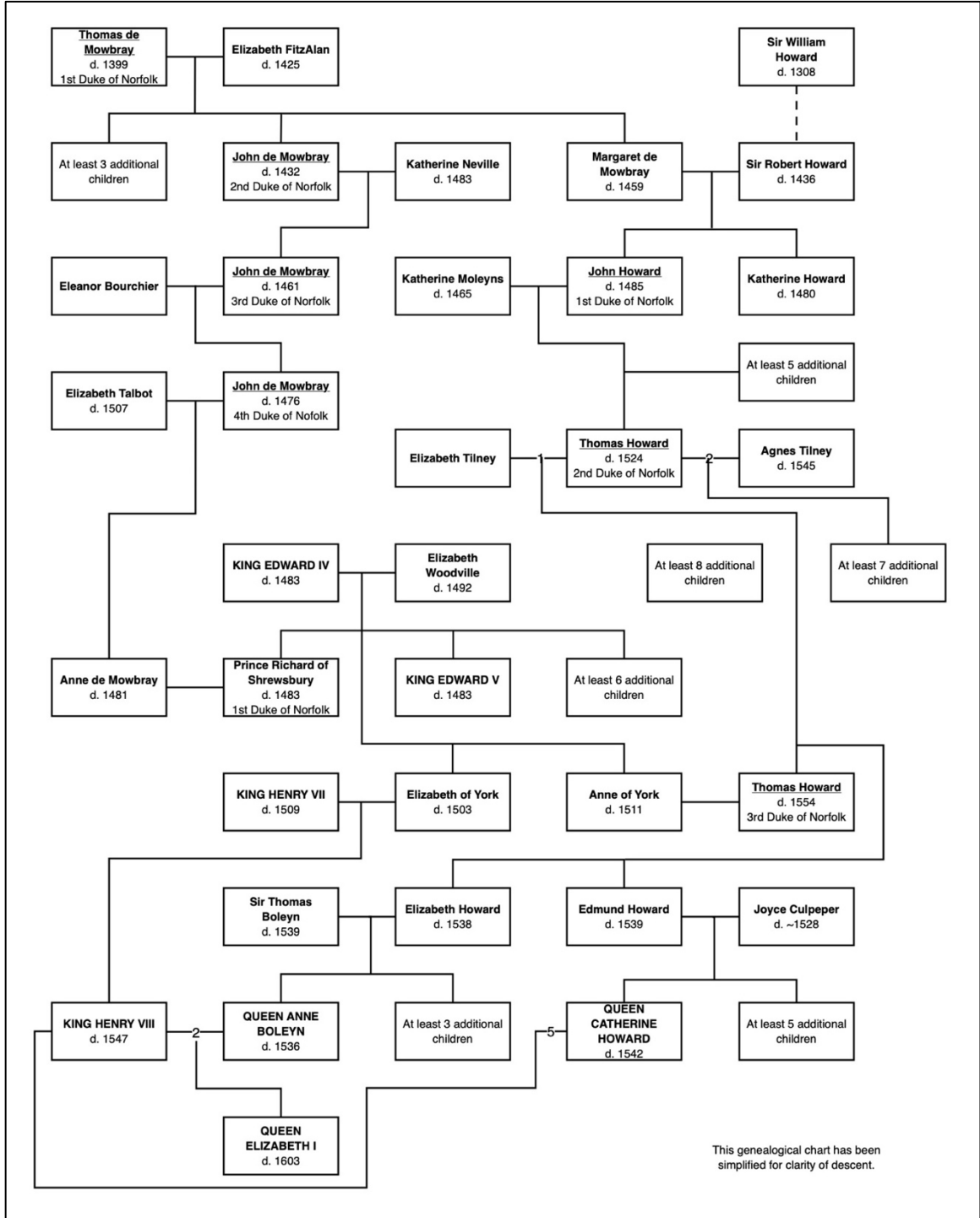


Figure 5. The de Mowbray and Howard Dukes of Norfolk, 1397–1554.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Tucker, *The Life of Thomas Howard*, 16; Claiden-Yardley, *Man Behind the Tudors*, ix; Cokayne, et al., *The Complete Peerage of England*, passim.

Chapter IV.

Edward Stafford, Third Duke of Buckingham

Among the shifts in the English polity during Henry's reign, one nobleman outshines his peers: Edward Stafford. Like Howard, he straddled the archetypal dichotomy of the old versus new nobility; yet, unlike Howard, he did so in such a way that he exemplifies a new model of the nobility. He was the largest private landholder in England, had been raised under Tudor guardianship, and was one of the great peers of the realm, yet his bloodline kept him on the periphery of the Tudor court.¹⁷⁷ He represented a new model of the nobility: his financial acumen, the way in which he managed his personal affairs, and the value he placed on education and learning all point towards what Gladys Temperley described as his more peaceful character, a more sedentary noble who appreciated the refinements of Renaissance culture and a gentler civilization.¹⁷⁸ Despite these positive traits, he was also snobbish, politically insensitive, and often aggressive towards Henry's new men.¹⁷⁹ Consequently, Henry's interactions with Stafford at court typify the king's reputed distrust of the power and wealth of the nobility and are emblematic of Henry's efforts to redefine the relationship between the Crown and the nobility.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 29; Carole Rawcliffe, *The Staffords, Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham 1394–1521* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 1.

¹⁷⁸ Temperley, *Henry 7*, 247.

¹⁷⁹ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 34-36; Gunn, *Henry VII's New Men*, 191.

¹⁸⁰ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 150.

Stafford spent his youth as a ward of the king's mother, Margaret Beaufort. This arrangement provided Henry an opportunity to mold Stafford into his idealized version of a nobleman: one who maintained the dignity of the Tudor court while remaining amenable towards royal service and who neither was able *nor desired* to challenge the king's authority.¹⁸¹ As he aged, Stafford personified a version of this new nobleman. He adapted certain traditional aspects of the nobility to the actualities of Henry's kingship, but he did so under his own terms, mindful of his lofty position. Initially efficacious under Henry, Stafford overplayed his hand and met the executioner's block under Henry VIII in 1521. But his actions during Henry VII's reign provide an image of the beginnings of a more passive nobility or, as Steven Gunn described, a "new role" of the nobility. However, to truly appreciate Stafford's impact, one must start with his youth and how it interconnected with the beginnings of the Tudor dynasty.

If one ignores his father's attainder, then Stafford was England's only duke and largest landowner when Henry took the throne in 1485.¹⁸² He was also only seven years old. Richard III's only parliament in January 1484 attained his father for his role in the Beaufort–Woodville conspiracy, after which Richard unleashed an unforgiving wrath upon his surviving family.¹⁸³ Stafford and his younger brother spent the remainder of Richard's reign on the lam, surreptitiously moving from house to house and relying on a

¹⁸¹ Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 65.

¹⁸² Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 1.

¹⁸³ Chris Given-Wilson, Paul Brand, Seymour Phillips, Mark Ormrod, Geoffrey Martin, Anne Curry and Rosemary Horrox, "Richard III: January 1484," in *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*. British History Online, accessed February 1, 2022, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/parliament-rolls-medieval/january-1484>.

few of their father's former retainers to avoid capture.¹⁸⁴ Their mother, Katherine Woodville (younger sister of Edward IV's queen), was abruptly taken from the family home at Brecon and sent to London, where she spent the following two years living under a harsh quasi-house arrest on a derisory income provided by Richard as an egocentric insult rather than as an act of charity.¹⁸⁵ Richard never gave up his hunt for her two sons. The considerable reward of £1,000 he offered for Stafford and the £500 for his brother remained payable up until his death at Bosworth.¹⁸⁶ If Richard were responsible for the

¹⁸⁴ The 1483 Beaufort–Woodville conspiracy was a failed assortment of uprisings against Richard III that occurred in October 1483. According to C. S. L. Davies, the principal contingent was primarily disaffected gentry, many of whom were supporters of Edward IV who wanted to see his son, Edward V, upon the throne. Davies argues that the conspiracy was only nominally led by Henry Stafford, second duke of Buckingham, and that the misnomer of “Buckingham’s Rebellion” was probably the result of the “parliamentary attainder that placed Buckingham at the center of events, perhaps to distract attention from this embarrassing truth” that the participants opposing Richard were “were overwhelmingly Edwardian loyalists.” When rumors arose that Edward V and his brother (the two Princes of the Tower) were likely dead, Henry Stafford is said to have proposed that Henry Tudor return from exile, marry Elizabeth of York (elder sister of the Princes of the Tower), and ascend the throne. Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 35; C. S. L. Davies, “Stafford, Edward, third duke of Buckingham (1478–1521).” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed December 7, 2021. <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/26202>.

¹⁸⁵ Public Record Office, *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward IV, Edward V, Richard III*, 436; Ross, *Richard III*, 149. Edward IV's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville in 1464 was a cause célèbre. At the time of their marriage, Elizabeth was an insolvent Lancastrian widow of humble origins with two minor children to raise—hardly a suitable candidate to become queen of England. Her modest credentials did not deter Edward, who married her in secret after an exceptionally short courtship, only disclosing the marriage publicly when he could no longer put off Louis XI's proposal that he marry a French princess. The marriage announcement dismayed much of the English nobility, most of whom felt the Woodvilles were too lacking in rank to tie into the royal family. Edward made the situation worse by his inordinate integration of the queen's relatives through marriage into nobility, many of whom were regarded as opportune exploiters. Edward's brother Richard (later Richard III) was one such individual, and he remained deeply suspicious of the queen's family. Following Edward's unexpected death, Richard accused the Woodvilles of manipulating the situation through Edward's son, Edward V, as an attempt to hold onto power. Depending on the source, this may have led Richard to usurp the throne and depose Edward V. Upon seizing the throne, Richard systematically extricated the Woodvilles from positions of power and influence. Katherine Woodville, as both a Woodville and wife of a convicted traitor, particularly drew the king's ire. For more information, see Chapter 5 in Charles Ross's *Edward IV* and Chapter 5 in Charles Ross's *Richard III*.

¹⁸⁶ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 35; Edward Hall, *Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York* (London, 1809), 387.

murder of Edward IV's two young sons—his nephews—then it seems clear what may have befallen the Stafford boys had they been captured.¹⁸⁷

The threat to Stafford only ended when Henry Tudor relieved Richard of his purloined crown at Bosworth. One of his first acts as king was to reverse the second duke of Buckingham's attainder and to return and increase Katherine Woodville's jointure.¹⁸⁸ This simultaneously restored Stafford to his dukedom and allowed his mother to return to the family home at Brecon. Nevertheless, an apparently gracious act by a compassionate conqueror was in actuality self-serving. First, it was a repudiation of Richard and his vindictive attempt to ruin Stafford's family. Polydore Vergil attributed the brunt of the 1483 Beaufort–Woodville conspiracy to Buckingham's attempt to depose Richard in favor of Henry. Thus, reversing the resulting attainder was an acknowledgment by its beneficiary of the personal debt he owed to the first magnate to die fighting for his Tudor cause.¹⁸⁹ Secondly, it further linked Henry to the Woodvilles, which promoted his goal of unifying the houses of York and Lancaster and propitiating the English polity. Katherine Woodville was the sister of Edward IV's queen and the aunt of Henry's expected bride, Elizabeth of York. She thereby was a connection between the new Tudor dynasty and the previous Yorkist regime. By restoring her position, Henry sought to reshape the Crown's relationship with the Woodvilles and merge their still-influential interests into his. Lastly, and most importantly, restoring Stafford positioned Henry to take custody of the young boy, now the third duke, as a royal ward. This gave him physical control of England's

¹⁸⁷ Thomas and Thornley, *The Great Chronicle*, 234.

¹⁸⁸ Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 35; Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 40.

¹⁸⁹ Vergil, *Three Books*, 198–199.

largest landholder—and his money—as he set about consolidating his power.¹⁹⁰ The enormity of the Stafford family’s wealth was well-known; thus, placing himself between the young Stafford and his property allowed him to “guide” the boy and contain his potential ambitions that may later threaten his crown. This is further evidenced by the political marriage of his uncle Jasper Tudor to Katherine Woodville, which brought her monies under Tudor control and more fully bonded the Staffords to the new regime.¹⁹¹

Fiscal considerations aside, there was another reason for Henry to control Stafford: the young Duke’s well-known, albeit tenuous, claim to the throne. Like Henry, Stafford traced his lineage to John of Gaunt through the legitimized Beaufort line that originated from Gaunt and his third wife, Katherine Swynford.¹⁹² This would mean that Stafford was a distant cousin of Henry. His claim was weak, mainly since it hinged on his paternal grandmother’s descent, but it was there nonetheless, and it made him a potential substitute for the throne. His minority was a drawback, but it was a temporary obstacle if he was provided good counsel. Yet Stafford had not acted against him, nor had there been any active plots to depose Henry in favor of the young duke. Therefore, Henry could not justify action against him. The next best option was to obtain control of Stafford and make it clear that he—Henry—was the rightful king. He laid the groundwork for this

¹⁹⁰ Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, 39. A week after the king’s coronation, Katherine Stafford was married to Henry’s uncle, Jasper Tudor. This marriage served three primary purposes. First, like the king’s, it was a combining of the houses of York and Lancaster and an attempt to tie both families to the new regime. Second, it was part of a scheme to bring approximately half of the extensive Stafford portfolio under the control of the Tudors. Katherine brought her new husband extensive lands, about half of the Stafford estates, which immediately boosted his income and regional standing. Finally, the marriage was intended to bolster Bedford’s position as Henry’s representative in Wales so that he now had territorial authority over, and income from, an extensive swath of land, from Milford Haven in the west to Essex in the east, with its center in Derbyshire.

¹⁹¹ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 31. See footnote 257 for additional information.

¹⁹² Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 25.

stratagem by including Stafford in his coronation ceremony in October 1485. There, the boy publicly swore fealty and was created a Knight of the Bath, which required additional pledges of fidelity and obedience.¹⁹³ Oaths aside, what Henry needed was control of Stafford, and wardship was the simple solution.

As the nobility held their land as tenants-in-chief of the king, they enjoyed the rights of feudal guardianship.¹⁹⁴ In general, these rights allowed a lord to take control of a minor and their inherited fief until the heir obtained the age of majority and performed the requisite acts of homage and fealty.¹⁹⁵ As the heir's custodian, the lord received the income of a fief belonging to their ward, minus any maintenance expenses. Wardship of a minor entailed responsibility for their rearing and education and brought the lucrative right to arrange the child's marriage, a right usually exploited to turn a profit because heirs and heiresses were valuable commodities on the marriage market.¹⁹⁶

As Stafford was only seven years old at Henry's coronation, he became a ward of the Crown. Under normal circumstances, the king would customarily sell the wardship and the right of marriage to the highest bidder. However, Stafford's proximity to the Crown and the size of his future inheritance made this an unlikely proposition; he was too important to extricate from royal wardship. Consequently, Henry granted custody of Stafford and lands to his mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, on August 3, 1486. The grant

¹⁹³ Walter C. Metcalfe, *A Book of Knights Banneret, Knights of the Bath, and Knights Bachelor, Made between the Fourth Year of King Henry VI and the Restoration of King Charles II and Knights Made in Ireland, between the Years 1566 and 1698, Together with an Index of Names* (London: Mitchell and Hughes, 1885), 11.

¹⁹⁴ Sue Sheridan Walker, "Widow and Ward: The Feudal Law of Child Custody in Medieval England," *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 3/4 (1976): 104, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177730>.

¹⁹⁵ Walker, 104.

¹⁹⁶ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 31.

took effect retrospectively, and Margaret received Stafford's land revenues dating back to September 1485.¹⁹⁷ Despite her right to these proceeds, prior mismanagement of the Stafford estates and the tendency to overvalue property meant a shortfall of income was expected.¹⁹⁸ Unfortunately, Margaret bore the brunt of such shortfalls, which evidences that her wardship was intended to physically control the boy rather than profit from him.

Royal wardship existed as an assertion of the Crown's dominance over the nobility, and Margaret's wardship of Stafford was a recognition that he had a viable right to the crown and therefore required close supervision.¹⁹⁹ Similarly, Edward Plantagenet, seventeenth earl of Warwick and the son of the late George, duke of Clarence, who dynastically represented the greatest risk to Henry's throne, was also placed into Margaret's custody.²⁰⁰ Margaret's household became a home for dynastic threats to her son's throne, although she undoubtedly agreed to such an arrangement out of her sense of duty and because of the prestige involved in rearing children of such high birth. Henry

¹⁹⁷ Michael K. Jones and Malcolm G. Underwood, *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 108; Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 30-32.

¹⁹⁸ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 40.

¹⁹⁹ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 32; Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, 67.

²⁰⁰ Harris, 32; Jones and Underwood, 67. While it may seem odd to modern audiences that Stafford and his brother were raised by the king's mother rather than their own, most noble children were raised by tutors and governesses instead of their parents. Margaret's role as guardian was entirely appropriate for the time. After all, the Stafford boys were distant cousins of the Tudors, and their residing in Margaret's household was an indication of their high status and importance. Furthermore, Margaret's second husband was Henry Stafford, the boys' great uncle. Thus, she had a marital connection to the children during a period when the English often looked to kin to raise their children. Finally, Margaret had a reputation for piety and learning, and her household functioned as a sort of school for children of high birth. Historian Barbara Harris wrote an extensive description of Margaret's position as guardian of the Stafford children in her book, *Edward Stafford Third Duke of Buckingham, 1478-1521*. For more information, see her second chapter, *The Young Duke*.

compensated her for her troubles by providing financial grants to offset losses in her execution of this duty.²⁰¹



Figure 6. Edward Stafford.²⁰²

While in Margaret’s custody, Stafford was educated by a group of graduate clerks that she personally selected. They would undoubtedly have endeavored to bend his sentiments towards the Tudor regime by instilling the ethos of loyal service to King Henry.²⁰³ As he was schooled in the heart of the Tudor establishment, it is entirely reasonable to view his education as a machination of Henry’s vision of the role of the nobility. His was a young mind to mold, and both Henry and Margaret would have

²⁰¹ *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry VII, vol I*, 155; Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 41.

²⁰² “Edward Bucking, 3rd Duke of Buckingham,” UK National Portrait Gallery, accessed January 18, 2022, <https://npgimages.com/search/?searchQuery=D23913>.

²⁰³ Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 35; Davies, “Stafford, Edward.”

required his instruction to reflect the king's definition of the relationship between Crown and nobility.²⁰⁴ During the 1483 Beaufort–Woodville conspiracy, Margaret worked diligently to bring the Stafford affinity behind her son's cause, and her efforts with the young Stafford were a continuation of her earlier attempts to broaden her son's support base.²⁰⁵ As an adult, Stafford exemplified the more passive noble, or what Gunn considers the new role of the nobility. That said, he engaged in the traditional responsibilities of the nobility as his rank demanded: he propagated the king's authority, participated in courtly ceremonies, and ostentatiously displayed his wealth to show the extremity of his status; but he adapted these activities to his own mannerisms, which differed from customary practice. Such adaptations were not limited to just traditional endeavors but were also realized using innovative techniques for managing his household—a trait more akin to a sixteenth-century courtier who concentrated on royal *favor* and his household management rather than on the administration of the state.²⁰⁶

Just as the new men bureaucratized Henry's government, Stafford used a similar methodology in the running of his household, innovating various financial controls and estate management practices that diverged from the approaches of his predecessors.²⁰⁷ This gave him a more "business" focus of estate management that emphasized profit, which allowed him a more civilized and sedentary lifestyle that focused on cultural

²⁰⁴ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 150.

²⁰⁵ Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, 67.

²⁰⁶ Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, 42-46.

²⁰⁷ J. L. Watts, "A New Fundacion of is Crowne: Monarchy in the Age of Henry VII," in *The Reign of Henry VII: Proceedings of the 1993 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Benjamin Thompson (Stamford: Paul Watkins 1995), 48-50.

pursuits rather than administration of the realm. Henry's coalescing of power and the use of the new men to run the government created a dichotomous split: the Crown governed and the nobility acquiesced. Compared with men such as John de Vere, Stafford is best described as a new version of the nobility, concerned more with cultural soft power rather than hard power. As the prototype of the new old nobility developed by the Tudors, he personified a version of Henry's ideal nobleman.

The significance of the way Stafford carried out certain traditional aspects of the nobility was that he did so more as a sixteenth-century courtier would than as a fifteenth-century nobleman. More than any other peer during Henry's reign, he illustrated the real-world changes resulting from the shift. These changes did not completely destroy the institutional power of the nobility, but they modified it. The nobility came to fill a more influence-based, advisory, and supportive role rather than one of arbiters of royal power.²⁰⁸ The exercise of traditional fifteenth-century noble power thereby became progressively handicapped by the domination of the Crown, made possible by the king's growing reliance on the new men. Noble power, where it was exercised, increasingly depended on a personal relationship with the king and could rarely be exerted on a nobleman's own volition.²⁰⁹ The nobility became more "auditors than soldiers," focused on obtaining royal favor through service and personal accolades based upon their professional skills and administrative position.²¹⁰ This period demonstrates a shifting focus by the nobility, away from the combative medieval model and towards a sedentary

²⁰⁸ Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, 42.

²⁰⁹ Gunn, 42.

²¹⁰ Gunn, 42; Gunn, "Courtiers of Henry VII," 27.

lifestyle in which power was exhibited through displays of wealth. In these respects, Stafford typifies this shift.

Stafford the Protégée

The nobility justified its elevated social structure through the provision of military service to their feudal overlord, but Stafford's experience illustrates the growing shift in the nobility away from this function.²¹¹ The twelfth century *preudomme*, the idealized noble male, was a practiced soldier and man of affairs, one who upheld the chivalric traditions of honor through service and noble conduct.²¹² This was the model of the English nobility at the end of the Yorkist period, but as exhibited by Stafford, the emphasis became less on martial endeavors and more on sedentary pursuits that upheld the appearance of honor. Although Stafford did not lack military experience—it is rare to find a member of the nobility who did not take up arms at some point during his lifetime—but his limited proficiency shows that it was not the leading manner by which he claimed his position. Rather, he asserted his nobility and honor purely on lineage and by his ability to portray himself as a social equal to the king.

In this context, his education in Margaret's house is germane. As a ward of the king's mother, Stafford's education reflected Henry's vision for his position. If the king desired a skilled, bellicose nobleman—a medieval model *preudomme*—then Margaret would have ensured Stafford received a suitable education that emphasized physical

²¹¹ Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility*, 2.

²¹² Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility*, 32–34.

training, the wielding of arms, horsemanship, and noble virtues.²¹³ However, from the information that survives, it appears Stafford's education focused almost exclusively on classical pursuits.²¹⁴ This suggests that Henry's vision for Stafford's future was as a placid, compliant nobleman, rather than as a medieval *preudomme*. If so, then Henry's plans for Stafford are a striking demonstration of his facilitation of the shift. The education Stafford received aligns with the reputation of Margaret's household, which was known to be an early humanist center of academic education.²¹⁵ This does not suggest that Henry intended to keep Stafford weak, but it does support the oft-repeated narrative that Henry was suspicious of the independent power of the nobility and thus sought to limit it.²¹⁶ Stafford was not instilled with a martial tutelage under what must have been Henry's direction, which is further evidence of a shift in the nobility's role, and it suggests that some part of it came from royal command.

Stafford's lack of martial upbringing was evident during the 1496 Scottish–Warbeck invasion. This event was the first serious challenge to Henry's throne that occurred when Stafford was old enough to participate. Though still Margaret's ward and therefore unable to access his own men or monies, his rank required that he contribute as much as possible. The lack of extensive primary source material on Stafford's participation may imply that his actions were not particularly impressive. Given his lack of martial education, this is unsurprising. Polydore Vergil and Edward Hall, who both

²¹³ Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy, 1066-1530* (London: Methuen, 1984), 18, 182–210, *passim*.

²¹⁴ Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 103; Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 35.

²¹⁵ Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, 202–204.

²¹⁶ Temperley, *Henry 7*, 245–249.

wrote extensively on the invasion, conspicuously neglect to mention Stafford by name when describing the nobility's response.²¹⁷ The fact that both these authors omit the richest landowner in England indicates that he was largely absent from any major involvement. What is known about his activity is that, rather than lead his own fighting contingent, as would have been expected of a medieval nobleman, he was instead only "present" with the royal army. Beyond this, the record of his participation is silent.²¹⁸ These records suggest that a new expectation of the nobility was forming, whereby it was acceptable to be merely *present* at—but not necessarily *lead*—the realm's defenses. Given that he was raised at the center of the Tudor establishment, his lack of battlefield ambition may have been a reflection of Henry's new role for the nobility.

Stafford the Prince

Henry wanted a different relationship between the Crown and the nobility from that of his predecessors—one where the king exercised unabridged control at the expense of the peerage.²¹⁹ This hunger for power was not new: there had long been struggles between the monarch and his leading noblemen over political domination. Some of the more infamous examples include Kings Stephen, John, Edward II, Richard II, Henry VI, and Richard III. However, unlike previous kings, Henry largely achieved his desired realignment due to the weakened position of the nobility following the Wars of the Roses. His paradigm was not a power-sharing arrangement but rather a coalescing of the

²¹⁷ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 42; Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, 107; Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 470–480.

²¹⁸ Hall, *Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families*, 484; Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 470–480; Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 42.

²¹⁹ Condon, "Ruling Elites," 120–122.

kingdom's political, legal, and financial resources under the Crown, with the nobility in a supportive role.²²⁰ As Barbara Harris candidly articulated, Henry “rejected the concept of government as a dialogue between the monarchy and the great lords,” and he was “determined to redefine the relationship between the Crown and nobility by strengthening the monarchy and central government.”²²¹ His determination to redefine their relationship provided the basis of his approach towards his leading nobles, particularly Stafford, whom he attempted to bend into a subservient noble.

What Henry desired from his nobility was its ornamentation and its addition of grandeur and pomp to his court. Such displays promoted himself and his power, prestige, and legitimacy.²²² While he was wary of the nobility's independent power base, socially, he lived amongst it. Its presence at court allowed him to maintain the continuity, dignity, and ceremony of the monarchy. This naturally included the kingdom's wealthiest and largest landholder of all—Stafford—despite his adolescence initially diminishing his stature. His youth was a temporary concession, and Margaret's wardship tied him to the Tudor Crown. He was, with the exception of the king's uncle, Jasper, the kingdom's only duke and the only one to predate Bosworth. His presence at court functions promoted a “noble continuity” and made Henry appear less foreign, which was necessary given his reputation in Yorkist circles as a usurper.²²³ Moreover, if Margaret's guardianship could

²²⁰ Condon, 120-122; Slavin, *The Precarious Balance*, 94.

²²¹ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 150.

²²² Condon, “Ruling Elites,” 121.

²²³ As Henry had spent most of his formative years in exile, he appeared somewhat foreign when compared to the rest of the court. Given also his obvious Welsh lineage—Tudor—the king was determined to make himself appear more “English.” This is particularly evident when looking at the circumstances surrounding Arthur's birth. His birth in Winchester rather than Westminster was purposeful and designed to link the new regime to the ancient British kings based in Wessex. Henry also

mold Stafford's attitudes to be in line with Henry's with respect to the role of the nobility, he could serve as an example of a new, Henrician-styled nobility.

As his reign progressed, Henry's court became increasingly grand. While he shared many of his mother's pious sensibilities, he saw the display of abundant splendor and dignity as necessary to promote the stability of his crown, and thereby persuaded observers to take him seriously.²²⁴ As Geoffrey Elton wrote, his court, "with its red-coated guard and its vast expenditure on silks, satins, and velvets, was always a gorgeous affair, and ceremonial was one thing on which Henry invariably spent in a prodigal manner."²²⁵ This was Henry's methodology: to demonstrate his court's grandness and himself at its apex. In this respect, Stafford was an ornament for display—a tool that could amplify Henry's majesty but also an embellishment that had to be watched carefully, lest it steal the show.

To understand Stafford's role in Henry's court, his propinquity to the king must be observed in a broad context. First, despite growing up in Margaret's reputedly unobtrusive household, Stafford pompously displayed his wealth at royal functions, particularly as he grew older.²²⁶ Such displays were inherently paradoxical for Stafford, especially in terms of currying royal favor. They presented him with a situation in which

chose the name "Arthur" for the legendary leader of the British resistance to the Saxon invasions during the fifth century. Under Henry's watchful eye, Prince Arthur was meant to follow in the footsteps of the perfect kingly figure displayed by the literary Arthur as described by Geoffrey of Monmouth. By associating his son and heir to the English folk legend, Henry promulgated a unifying, and *English*, message to the realm's political elite.

²²⁴ Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, 75; Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 298–299, 306; Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 155.

²²⁵ Geoffrey Elton, *England Under the Tudors* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 43.

²²⁶ Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, 4–6, 11, 188–189.

either course of action worsened his reputation in the eyes of the king. On one hand, his pretentiousness added to the splendor of Henry's royal court, which itself enhanced the king's prestige. On the other hand, it conspicuously reminded the king of the vastness of his independent wealth. Taking into consideration his blood proximity to the Crown, this complicated his position at court. Like Henry, Stafford traced his descent through the legitimized Beaufort line sired by John of Gaunt to Edward III; thus, his claim almost mirrored Henry's. Kinship to the king was a double-edged sword: Henry's uncle, Jasper Tudor, duke of Bedford, spent his life selflessly advancing the interests of his nephew, his dedication likely a result of having no sons of his own for whom he could lobby.²²⁷ On the contrary, a young, rich man such as Stafford, who was capable of siring sons of his own, posed a threat to a reigning dynasty, particularly one like Henry's, which had difficulty producing male heirs. The combination of these two factors prompted Henry to treat Stafford with deep suspicion and consequently to be mindful about how he was used at court.

Henry's distrust relegated Stafford to a peripheral position at court, and he was intentionally excluded from significant roles and meaningful positions in government. His role was to be an accessory—an object for display—rather than a proprietor of policy or authority, like de Vere and later Howard. Though he participated in state trials that involved high-ranking noblemen, his place was to be present as a way to legitimize verdicts that had already been decided by Henry and his closest advisors. He was rarely involved in deliberations to decide guilt or punishment.²²⁸ The only time Stafford played

²²⁷ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 154.

²²⁸ Harris, 155.

a meaningful role was when he was present at state events such as coronations, weddings, diplomatic functions, and celebrations to mark the maturation of the king's children. However, interestingly, he only participated in events that moved him further away from inheriting the crown.

Stafford's first public role was arguably Henry's most important: the coronation. The affair was Henry's first great public pronouncement following Bosworth, and it introduced England to its first new ruling dynasty since William the Conqueror. Stafford, as the recently restored duke of Buckingham, was present, despite being only seven years old. His presence was necessary because it was a demonstration of the nobility's acknowledgment of Henry's ascension and the forging of a new Crown–nobility relationship. Henry provided the young boy with splendid new bridles, buttons, and horses to match the occasion, all of which were designed to enhance the visual pageantry of the festivities.²²⁹ The contrast was stark: Henry, the strong, 28-year-old victor of Bosworth, was crowned wearing the ornate regalia of state and flanked by his great lords dressed in gold; while his cousin, the young, feeble seven-year-old Stafford sat nearby in support, displaying gifts bestowed by his superior. For anyone considering Stafford as a suitable substitute for Henry, the juxtaposition of a battle-tested man versus a tame child precluded further consideration. England, weary from years of civil strife that originated during the reign of the last boy-king Henry VI, had little appetite for further dynastic bloodshed. The visual messaging was distinct—Henry was strong, mighty, conquering, and now king; Stafford was young, pliable, supportive, and subservient.

²²⁹ Legg, *English Coronation Records*, 207, 221.

While his participation in the coronation ceremony aggrandized the new king, Stafford's future presence at courtly ceremonies became a bellwether for his proximity to the crown. As his claim closely resembled the king's, it was important from Henry's perspective that Stafford be present at ceremonies that celebrated the advancement of his children as an acknowledgement of their successional precedence over Stafford. Stafford was present at ceremonies where he descended successional, such as Arthur's wedding to Catherine of Aragon; conversely, he was absent from those where he ascended, such as Arthur's funeral. Because securing the succession was Henry's highest priority, Stafford's blood proximity kept him under perpetual suspicion, and his presence at certain events shows the king's distrust of him.

Prince Arthur was born in September 1486. As the first Tudor prince, his birth provided the regime with a future that was not solely dependent on the king's survival.²³⁰ For England, it was the culmination of the union of the houses of York and Lancaster and a final end to the Wars of the Roses. However, for Stafford, Arthur's birth moved him further away from inheriting the throne.²³¹ Arthur's investiture as Prince of Wales took place in 1489 in an elaborate ceremony that lauded his elevation to the top of the peerage.²³² Stafford was eleven years old at the time, making him too young to carry out any significant ceremonial duties. As a duke, his role would normally have been to escort the prince to the king's presence, then stand immediately behind him while Henry conferred Arthur's new rank. His placement *behind* would have purposely paralleled his

²³⁰ Cunningham, *Prince Arthur*, 17.

²³¹ John Wagner and Susan Schmid, eds., *Encyclopedia of Tudor England* (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 1104.

²³² Cunningham, *Prince Arthur*, 45.

rank *below* the prince. However, as he was too young to participate, he instead attended Lady Margaret. The realm's other two dukes—Jasper Tudor and John de la Pole—performed the ducal roles in his place.²³³ Still, his presence was significant, and while he did not have a say in whether he attended, his appearance was necessary for its symbolic and visual implication. Arthur, not Stafford, was now clearly next in line, and thus placement next to the king's mother signified his movement away from the Crown.

This ceremony was repeated five years later when Henry's second son, the future Henry VIII, was invested as the duke of York in November 1494.²³⁴ However, at this ceremony, Stafford was old enough to participate in what was symbolically his further successional demotion. Nonetheless, his role was purely ornamental: he partook in the opening procession, whereby he followed the king and the king's blood-uncle as they entered. After Henry-the-younger's formal elevation to duke of York, Stafford was the first to pay him homage on bended knee as his new superior.²³⁵ As with Arthur's investiture, Stafford's presence was used to represent his recognition of his place further down in the succession.

Second only to his own coronation, Arthur's marriage to Catherine of Aragon in 1501 was Henry's crowning achievement. Their union was the culmination of a year-long diplomatic effort between Henry and Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain that finally validated him as the undisputed English king and his descendants as the heirs apparent. By agreeing to marry their daughter to the Tudor heir apparent, Ferdinand and Isabella

²³³ Cunningham, *Prince Arthur*, 49.

²³⁴ Gairdner, ed., *Letters and Papers*, 393.

²³⁵ Gairdner, 393.

strengthened Henry's crown via Catherine's bloodline and legitimized the House of Tudor in the eyes of Europe's monarchs, some of whom had yet to accept Henry's kingship.²³⁶ The extravagant wedding ceremony reflected Henry's diplomatic coup and the stabilized foundation on which his legacy now appeared. For the wedding, Henry spent approximately £14,000 on French jewels alone; comparatively speaking, his annual income during this period is estimated to be about £113,000, which makes his jewelry acquisition all the more impressive.²³⁷

Naturally, Stafford attended the wedding. Whereas he had been Margaret's ward during Arthur's investiture ceremony, by 1501 he was officially of age. Thus, one should view his presentation as being reflective of his self-image rather than the influence of another person. Stafford used public appearances and royal functions as platforms to exhibit his position, and state occasions provided opportunities to demonstrate a sort of social equality to the Crown. Socially, he was beneath the royal family, but his extreme wealth allowed him to downplay his lower status and appear as an almost equal. Visual presentation was essential; thus, for Stafford, these events were opportunities to surpass each of his earlier sartorial triumphs. He appeared at Arthur's wedding wearing an ornately decorated gown "wrought of nedyll work and sett upon cloth of tyssu furrid wyth sablys" valued at a staggering £1,500, which rivaled even the king's costume.²³⁸ It may have been Arthur's wedding, but Stafford's attire ensured that he shared part of the

²³⁶ Cunningham, *Prince Arthur*, 122–123.

²³⁷ Cunningham, *Prince Arthur*, 142; Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 126.

²³⁸ Thomas and Thornley, *The Great Chronicle*, 311; Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 93; Davies, "Stafford, Edward;" Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 156.

limelight. The fact that so many sources like the *Great Chronicle* recorded his appearance show that his effort was not in vain.

Each of these ceremonies are comparable in that they celebrate the advancement of the king's children. Each time one of them progressed in life—be it with new titles or a marriage—Stafford's proximity to the crown decreased. But opposing cases were also revealing: in cases where Stafford's proximity to the Crown increased, he was notably absent from the ritual associated with that event. Following Arthur's death in 1502, Stafford's nonappearance at the funeral ceremonies is just as significant as the presence of the realm's other leading noblemen since his rank necessitated his attendance.²³⁹ Furthermore, as the prince nominally governed Wales and the bordering English shires—lands that fell within Stafford's purview—Stafford should have been present from an establishment perspective. However, Arthur's death created a succession crisis that challenged Henry's legacy. Had he attended, Stafford's presence would have advertised his royal blood and would have invited conversations about his place within the succession. The king's second son was now the heir apparent, but he was the last son, and Elizabeth was at the end of her child-bearing years. If the duke of York died, then Stafford would likely become the next in line, and the Tudor dynasty would end at Henry's death. The king was not prepared to make such a pronouncement, so Stafford was kept from Arthur's funeral. As his role in Henry's court was to be ornamental and appear supportive of the regime, any nearing of Stafford to the Crown complicated Henry's reign.

²³⁹ Cunningham, *Prince Arthur*, 199.

Henry wanted his court to reflect the merging of the kingdom's political, legal, and financial resources under his crown, and he wanted the nobility to play a supporting role as he expanded royal authority. He thus envisioned an ornamental nobility, exemplified by Stafford. As a member of the nobility, Stafford's wealth and status entitled him admission to Henry's council, but the king's redefined relationship between himself and his great nobleman meant Stafford was repeatedly refused admission and kept from any sort of governing functions. In response, and unlike his contemporaries, he made no attempt to conceal his discontent, which he displayed through increasingly grand and flashy appearances at court.²⁴⁰ He adapted himself in this way because his immense wealth allowed him to do so. Unfortunately for him, such behaviors labeled him a troublemaker, for which he later met the executioner's ax.

Stafford the Posh

The vast scale of Stafford's wealth afforded him an eccentrically grandiose lifestyle that would appear better placed in the late sixteenth-century than at the end of the late medieval period. Whereas men like Vere and Howard obtained their positions and livelihood from the king's favor, Stafford, following his restoration, was less beholden to Henry's favor than most. Henry's favor was not inconsequential to Stafford—as king, he held significant sway over Stafford and applied both financial and social pressure to exert influence and control over him—but Stafford owned the most sizable estates in England, worth at least £5,000 annually. His landholdings stretched the breadth of the country, going as far north as Yorkshire and as far south as the lordships of

²⁴⁰ Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 186.

Brecon and Newport in southern Wales.²⁴¹ The magnitude of his riches was immense: his inheritance of some 124 manors, twelve castles, nine hundreds, eleven boroughs, and 65 other sizable properties, which easily made him the richest magnate, only eclipsed by the monarchy itself.²⁴² This placed him in a category of his own. None of Stafford's contemporaries could boast owning such numerous or valuable properties. The king's step-father, Thomas Stanley, the earl of Derby, was close, with lands said to be worth between £4,000 and £5,000 per annum based on a valuation from the time of the sixth earl.²⁴³ Meanwhile Stafford's brother-in-law, Henry Percy, fifth earl of Northumberland, had an annual income around £3,900.²⁴⁴ However, no other noble had lands worth an excess of £3,000 per annum—not even Jasper Tudor.²⁴⁵

As a man of the peerage without an impressive military background, Stafford relied on his affluence to bolster his reputation. Stafford's adult life fell within the period that David Starkey referred to as "the age of the household," which corresponds remarkably well to the shift.²⁴⁶ According to Starkey, the Tudor nobleman's household served four important purposes: it provided the nobleman and his family with the basic essentials of life; it served as a basis for the administration of the nobleman's estates,

²⁴¹ Davies, "Stafford, Edward."

²⁴² Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 104; Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 129–133.

²⁴³ Barry Coward, *The Stanleys, Lords Stanley, and Earls of Derby, 1385–1672: the origins, wealth, and power of a landowning family* (Manchester: The Chetham Society, 1983), 187.

²⁴⁴ John Bean, *The Estates of the Percy Family, 1416–1537* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 140.

²⁴⁵ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 104.

²⁴⁶ David Starkey, "The Age of the Household: Politics, Society and the Arts c. 1350–c.1550," in *The Later Middle Ages*, ed. Stephen Medcalf, Nicola Coldstream, Marjorie Reeves, David Starkey (London: Routledge, 1981), 225–290.

lands, and business interests; through its size and grandeur, it affirmed the nobleman's social and economic position; and it supplied the nobleman his political influence and his military power. The nobleman was at the center of his household, with his immediate family in close proximate orbit, followed by his closest advisers and retainers, and it was his responsibility to be the household's caretaker, to expand it, and to pass it to future generations. As England's wealthiest nobleman, Stafford sought to maintain and advertise the power and prestige of his household and his proud lineage, particularly as he had been kept away from power on the king's council.

Stafford's advertisement of wealth was not unusual in and of itself—the nobility long placed great importance and value on the visual expression of wealth and consumption.²⁴⁷ A nobleman who failed to live in showy opulence risked losing his communal dignity, his influence, and the respect of his contemporaries, including the king. This was not a concern for Stafford, whose residential household was impressive in size. Richard Mynors, his treasurer, recorded that Stafford's household typically included 130 people.²⁴⁸ This included Stafford, his immediate family, and close relatives, as well as councilors, chaplains, personal attendants, domestic servants, visiting estate officials, artisans in temporary employment, traveling minstrels, and the occasional beggar.²⁴⁹ All of these people had to be fed, housed, and many were clothed in liveries, all of which Stafford underwrote. Records from Stafford's accounts show that from November 5, 1507 to March 22, 1508, at least a 100 people per day, usually closer to 125, ate at

²⁴⁷ McFarlane, *Nobility of Later Medieval England*, 96.

²⁴⁸ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 77.

²⁴⁹ Harris, 77; Paul Van Brunt Jones, *The Household of a Tudor Nobleman* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1918), 11.

Stafford's expense.²⁵⁰ However, on special occasions, this number was dramatically higher. For Christmas 1508, Stafford hosted "two hundred and ninety-four people at dinner and supper, of whom one hundred and eighty-two at dinner, and one hundred seventy-six at supper were 'strangers.'"²⁵¹ Two weeks later on January 6, 1509, at the Feast of Epiphany, Stafford "entertained five hundred and nineteen people at dinner and four hundred at supper, the total number of strangers at the first repast being three hundred and nineteen, and at supper two hundred and seventy-nine."²⁵² To call Stafford's household a hub of activity is an understatement: it was always filled not only with those who resided within, but also those who were charged with serving the residents.

Stafford's wealth is perhaps best illustrated by the number of his retainers and household staff, all of whom required continual payment of wages and provision of housing and clothing allowances. A household roll from the period between 1511 and 1514 shows that Stafford's family required a staff of approximately 225 to attend them, at an annual cost of £650 in wages. Of these, 130 were assigned to attend Stafford personally, and the rest were divided by his wife and other household residents.²⁵³ By comparison, the typical noble household of the period employed between 75 and 140 persons to serve all residents.²⁵⁴ When Stafford traveled, he took with him upwards of 60

²⁵⁰ Harris, 77; Jones, 11.

²⁵¹ Jones, *Household of a Tudor Nobleman*, 167.

²⁵² Jones, 167.

²⁵³ Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 88.

²⁵⁴ Jones, *Household of a Tudor Nobleman*, 11.

or more to attend him on the road, underscoring that the staff numbers were not limited to just the household.²⁵⁵

Stafford's household was more than a place where he lived and operated: it was a statement of his wealth and power. From his residence, he and his family dispensed alms; promoted causes; dressed in luxurious and opulent garments; amassed impressive quantities of jewels, gold, silver, and other fineries; celebrated their family's lineage; and offered hospitality to travelers. Stafford dressed his servants in fine, showy liveries made from decadent cloth. Records show that he provided uniform cloths to 149 people in December 1515, 80 of whom were servants within the household itself.²⁵⁶ This contributed to the visual splendor of the Stafford household, further promoting the duke.

Such displays of wealth are not unique to the period and are typical to Stafford's position, but the scale of his display sets him apart from his contemporaries. Whereas many of his fellow noblemen had both household and martial retainers, Stafford had primarily household retainers: men and women who specialized in the legal, accounting, and household functions necessary for the smooth and efficient operation of his estates.²⁵⁷ Stafford focused less on martial involvements than on the employment of specialized household staff, and his priorities thus illustrate how the noble household continued to shift towards a more complex operational model and away from a source of soldierly exploits. Stafford was more settled than his contemporaries, and the makeup of his staff reflects that fact. His treasurers and stewards, men such as Richard Pole and Humphrey

²⁵⁵ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 77.

²⁵⁶ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 77.

²⁵⁷ Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 91.

Bannaster, tended to come from a higher social class, and while not socially equal to Stafford, they brought an air of professionalism and elevated status. Pole was a wealthy landowner in his own right and, like the king's new men, hailed from the upper levels of the gentry. He was an experienced accountant and manager, and he had acted as both receiver of Gloucestershire and to his mother, Dowager Duchess Katherine Stafford. Similarly, Bannaster was an experienced official with knowledge of conciliar and judicial affairs. Their utilization by Stafford increased the efficient operation of his estates, serving to further increase his wealth.

Stafford's manner of living illustrates the move to a more sedentary, less martial lifestyle. He was neither innovator nor instigator of such a shift but rather was the exemplar of it. As Henry used his new men in the professional administration of his government, Stafford recognized the value derived by the king by the use of such skill sets and patterned his household after the king's.²⁵⁸ The shift in the nobility's lifestyle provided a great impetus for further adaptations by Stafford. While some may be tempted to call him innovative, one must be careful about assigning him too much credit. Many of his "innovations" existed in some fashion before he came of age, and he simply employed such techniques in his own house. While perhaps not an innovator, he certainly was an adapter, adopting and employing new concepts to suit his specific needs.

Stafford the Prototype

The gradual shift in the nobility towards a more business-oriented, sedentary lifestyle is well illustrated by adaptations Stafford made to the way he lived. As the rising

²⁵⁸ Jones, *Household of a Tudor Nobleman*, 22.

gentry—and the new men in particular—became increasingly influential, the nobility’s overall role at court diminished. Inevitably, many nobles began to focus their attention inward towards more localized matters.²⁵⁹ At the heart of these regional affairs was each nobleman’s particular estates, and the most forward-looking began to pay greater attention to how they operated their domains. Innovations and adaptations in capital management, household affinities, the physical makeup of the chief residences, and new leisurely pursuits all progressed, eventually creating the sixteenth-century courtier nobility, which was markedly different from the previous medieval warrior nobility. As the largest landholder in early Tudor England, Stafford’s adaptations highlight this growing shift. Though not all of his adaptations were specifically “innovative,” they were highly visible given his rank, relationship with the king, and vast wealth, and they demonstrate the initial transformation of the nobility into what would later become the courtier class under the succeeding Stuart monarchs.

Stafford developed many of his business-like attributes while in Margaret’s household. Many of the organizational techniques he utilized, such as his hierarchical administrative structure, were reflections of her management methodologies.²⁶⁰ This is unsurprising: during his minority, she administered the bulk of his estates as his guardian (though a portion was managed by Jasper Tudor Stafford’s mother’s husband) and her lasting influence is recognizable.²⁶¹ While the young Stafford was in her charge, she

²⁵⁹ Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, 43; Natalie Mears, “Courts, Courtiers, and Culture in Tudor England,” *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 3 (September 2003): 707.

²⁶⁰Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 105.

²⁶¹ While Margaret administered the major part of Stafford’s estates during his minority, the other portion was managed by Jasper Tudor, the king’s uncle and duke of Bedford, as husband to Stafford’s mother, Katherine Woodville. Following Tudor and Woodville’s marriage on November 7, 1485,

preserved and expanded the Stafford family estate's administrative structure that had been introduced by the second duke.²⁶² Her management style concentrated on comprehensive centralization and obtaining all monies, dues, and properties legally owed. She had a single receiver-general who was responsible for collecting her fees and keeping meticulous records when certain feudal dues were left outstanding.²⁶³ Margaret was kept well-informed by her administrators at the local level as to the status of her accounts receivable ledgers, and she was quick to bring actions against tenants who failed to remunerate their feudal responsibilities.²⁶⁴ Such business acumen was passed to Stafford, who effectively capitalized thereon after obtaining the liveries for his lands and became responsible for their management.

As Stafford used many of the estate administrative methods he learned in Margaret's household, he was not so much *innovative* as *adaptative* to the financial pressures of his rank. Not only did he have to toil harder than most to extract enough money from his lands to support his extravagant lifestyle, but he was also often indebted to the Crown and had to squeeze his tenants to make payments on his enormous debts. Like Margaret, he centralized revenue collection through a single receiver-general, responsible for assembling and tracking his monies from all of his estates. Stafford was

Woodville's assets came under Tudor's control. This may explain why parliament increased her jointure from 1,000 marks per annum (roughly equivalent to £666 13s 4d) to £1,500 per annum. In her book *Edward Stafford, Third Duke of Buckingham, 1478–1521*, Barbara Harris argues that Tudor was a "careful and conscientious" administrator of his wife's property and that no evidence exists that suggests he wasted any part of the Stafford estates to enhance his own profits. Following Tudor's death in 1495 and Woodville's death in 1497, the remainder of her jointure reverted to Stafford, who took full control of his inheritance in 1498.

²⁶²Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 105.

²⁶³ Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, 105–106.

²⁶⁴ Jones and Underwood, 105–106.

proactive regarding his finances: his signature on the bottom of his receiver-general's journals indicated that he had examined each page for errors or signs of dishonesty.²⁶⁵ Given the vastness of his lands in terms of size and geographic distribution, his receiver-general relied on a network of "sub-receivers," each of whom was assigned responsibility for a particular group of lands.

Stafford maintained the administrative structure introduced by his father and refined by Margaret, and he continued to modify it to increase efficiency. He divided the totality of his lands into nine groups—collectively called the "general circuit"—and hired a "sub-receiver" to oversee each group. Each sub-receiver was responsible for reporting on the financial situation for their respective group, collecting fees owed, and sending funds upward to the receiver-general. Additionally, Stafford employed a steward in each of his counties, who acted as his leading representative. Each steward received an annual salary ranging from 26s to £20 and was accountable for bidirectional communication between Stafford and his tenants.²⁶⁶ Though not all were effective at their jobs, and many undoubtedly delegated and outsourced their responsibilities to subordinates of varying qualifications, Stafford had created the semblance of an organizational hierarchical structure that would be recognizable in any modern boardroom. Like Margaret, he was well informed of the financial happenings at the local level of his estates, which enabled him to swiftly address issues and efficiently increase the amounts of income collected. While the vastness of his lands prevented a completely efficient operation, following his death in 1521, a survey commissioned by Henry VIII to audit Stafford's finances

²⁶⁵ Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 89.

²⁶⁶ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 105.

suggested that his net annual income was in excess of £5,000, a staggering figure eclipsed only by the royal court.²⁶⁷

What Stafford demonstrated was a shift towards a “business-like” nobility, one that focused on the effective organization, administration, and financial extraction of its lands as a methodology to maintain and demonstrate its power. He increasingly viewed his lands’ financial output as the primary source of his political power since he was denied influential power by his physical separation from court; thus, he demanded maximum profits wherever he could.²⁶⁸ In a sense, as the king’s court bureaucratized and modernized under the new men’s professionalism, so too did Stafford’s ducal court. As the slow but steady demilitarization of the nobility progressed into the mid-sixteenth century, rendering many of their martial abilities less relevant, business-like operations and maximizing the financial output of privately held resources became the methodology by which to retain and exhibit power and importance.²⁶⁹

If Stafford was to maximize his lands’ profits, then he required a personal retinue that was designed for such rather than focused on warfare. As a member of the nobility with deep pockets but without an extensive martial background or training, Stafford may be assumed to have employed large affinities to act as his private army and fulfill his feudal duties to the king. After all, the nobility previously justified its elevated position through its ability to quickly provide fighting forces to defend the realm and their feudal

²⁶⁷ Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, 110; Cunningham, *Prince Arthur*, 200.

²⁶⁸ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 105.

²⁶⁹ Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, 43

overlords.²⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Henry's general abstention from any large-scale conflicts and Stafford's purposeful exclusion from the king's council and courtly politics rendered his provision of such forces largely moot. Instead, he focused his energies on the fiscal management of his estates, and prioritized retainers that could assist him in the administration of vast landed resources. His business acumen served more than to simply enhance his financial largess; it was also necessary to maintain his requisite ducal lifestyle considering the enormous debts he owed to the Crown shortly after coming of age.²⁷¹ The size and composition of Stafford's household retinue show his emphasis on localized financial administration over provisioning a strong military capability, which paralleled certain changes in the royal court and the growing shift in the nobility in general. This suggests that he, much like the nobility, largely narrowed his focus to regional rather than national government and moved away from the martial foundation of his station and competition with the king's power to engage in more docile pursuits.

Every great landowner relied heavily upon an inner circle of administrative staff—including lawyers, accountants, and influential retainers—to whom they could turn for advice and assistance in the running of their estates. Given his extensive landholdings across England, Stafford's reliance on his administrative retainers was perhaps greater than most, yet his motivations were nearly always financial. His attitudes towards his tenants and his administrative retainers can be summed up in an instruction he provided to his collectors in 1504 who were touring his lands to exact owed rental incomes:

²⁷⁰ Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility*, 2.

²⁷¹ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 44.

“Dryve thayme in their covenantes asmouche to oure prouffite as ye can.”²⁷² Given the fiscal pressures imposed on him by the king, it is unsurprising that he would have passed those same pressures to those beneath him who owed feudal responsibilities.

The large number of lawyers on Stafford’s payroll is particularly noteworthy, as it demonstrates that, as with Margaret, he was quick to bring actions in common law against those who potentially owed him something or reneged on a debt. Like his former guardian, Stafford was determined to obtain everything that was owed to him and was extremely litigious to the extent that it padded the bottom line. During his life, he instituted an astonishing 128 lawsuits against a myriad of people in the Courts of the Common Pleas and King’s Bench.²⁷³ Considering that he entered his lands in March 1498 and was executed in May 1521, this averages to over five lawsuits per year. Unsurprisingly, of his 58 closest advisers that are known by name and served Stafford for extended periods of time, 13 were lawyers, many of whom were at the top of their profession; for example, at one time, Edmund Dudley, who later went on to become one of the king’s most influential advisers, was on Stafford’s legal payroll.²⁷⁴ This number does not include the many other law clerks who assisted his retained lawyers nor the one-off lawyers hired to handle specific cases in specific courts; many such records no longer exist. Clearly, Stafford was no stranger to using the law to his benefit, and though he was not always successful, he demonstrated a change in how the nobility ran its business affairs.

²⁷² T. B. Pugh, *The Marcher Lordships of South Wales, 1415–1536: Select Documents* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1963), 282.

²⁷³ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 95.

²⁷⁴ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 94; Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 227–231.

In addition to his retainers, the physical nature of Stafford's principal household and the courtly displays within reflect a change in the lifestyle of England's great magnates towards sedentariness. His desire for the more stately, civilized way of life manifested itself in many ways, the chief of which was an increased expenditure on building and domestic improvements, as well as the "regalization" of his daily life and the display thereof, styled on how the king showed his supremacy. The sixteenth-century landowners looked towards imposing bricks and mortar and in-residence courtly displays—rather than a great train of livered affinities—to express their wealth, power, and position. In this respect, Stafford was almost avant-garde.

As has been stated, Stafford's lands were vast, encompassing numerous estates and manors throughout England, with his principal residence at Thornbury Castle. After he reached the age of majority, Stafford began a massive rebuilding project at Thornbury modeled on the splendor of the royal Richmond Palace that was designed to provide him with a home suitable for his engrossed rank.²⁷⁵ The physical nature of his rebuilding demonstrates the shift away from the martial priorities of the nobility towards a more sedentary lifestyle in which power was exhibited through visual opulence instead of through armed affinities. While Thornbury was called a "castle" and contained some castellated properties, these were primarily aesthetic enhancements that spoke to the affluence of the occupants rather than attempts at constructing a true military fortress. The main gate was designed with a portcullis and surrounding towers, and the inner court was built with a massive surrounding wall with placed battlements, but the lack of a

²⁷⁵ "Thornbury Castle," Historic England, accessed February 10, 2022, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000569>.

moat, the large gallery, and the bay windows fronting the courtyards, along with the grand oriel windows on the external walls and the ornate “Tudor-style” chimneys all belied a serious military purpose. McFarlane hinted that Thornbury’s limited defensive capabilities were designed more as a contingency during a short-term emergency such as civil disorder rather than as a center of war and rebellion.²⁷⁶ Stafford’s intention was to create a fitting environment for a lavish lifestyle in a building that spoke to his grandeur while offering his family a protective space near the tumultuous Welsh marches.

Inside Thornbury, Stafford ran a ducal court fit for a royal palace. He maintained an intricate system to keep his household functioning smoothly, headed by an advisory council that included his most trusted retainers and major administrative officials. Beneath this council were the working household departments, which included wardrobe, jeweler, bed chamberlain, armorer, stablemaster, chaplain, and household proper (responsible for preparing the meals and keeping the house orderly).²⁷⁷ Each of these departments were further broken down into sub-departments responsible for specific tasks and people within the Stafford family. All told, Stafford’s household and wardrobe expenses were massive, but they reflected the opulence used to convey his rank and his power. He did not view himself in terms of prowess of military success, nor ability to quickly call forth well-armed affinities ready to follow him into battle, but rather in his ability to recapitulate the impressive regal style of the king. His household expenses totaled £5,048 1s for 1518; £6,286 18s for 1519; and £7,098 12s for 1520, all of which

²⁷⁶ McFarlane, *Nobility of Later Medieval England*, 209.

²⁷⁷ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 93.

far exceed those of his contemporaries.²⁷⁸ The primary expenditures were wardrobe, entertainment (including foods), and jewels: all objects of a grandiose display of civilized, moneyed life rather than objects that could be used to challenge the Crown's authority. When comparing Stafford to peers such as de Vere and Howard, we see a completely different nobleman who appeared more fixated on crafting an opulent personal image rather than obtaining royal favor from the king.

Stafford's typification of the shift or his semblance of the sixteenth-century courtier is perhaps best illustrated by his scholarly pursuits. Stafford showed an interest in education and books throughout his life, likely another trait gleaned from his childhood in Margaret's household. His love of learning led his biographer Carole Rawcliffe to assert that he "was clearly the first English noblemen to whom the term 'renaissance aristocrat' can properly be applied."²⁷⁹ Rawcliffe may have been premature in using the word "renaissance," as it implies that Stafford pivoted towards the classics and understood the predominant humanist conception—then leading the philosophical movement—of which there is scant evidence. But her point—that he showed a deep propensity for lifelong learning and for the collection of books—is well-taken. Stafford was not unique in his scholarly pursuits: members of the period's nobility were not, by and large, illiterate. John Howard, first duke of Norfolk, owned a library filled with chivalric and romantic takes, and sent his son and heir, Thomas Howard, to the Thetford Grammar School for an

²⁷⁸ Harris, *Edward Stafford*, 100-102.

²⁷⁹ Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 103.

early education.²⁸⁰ Stafford's grandmother, Anne, the first duchess of Buckingham, was renowned for owning a well-stocked library, much of it providing the foundation for Stafford's.²⁸¹ However, the amount of time he spent with his books and his providing books to boys in his service set him apart from other noblemen and made him a forerunner to the sixteenth-century educational revolution amongst the ruling classes.²⁸²

Having received a good education in Margaret's household, Stafford acted as a patron for education for his family and for boys connected to his establishments as servants.²⁸³ He instructed his wardrober to provide each child in his service a primer and a Latin grammar book and allowed books from his own collection to be made available to his household staff as a sort of lending library. The majority of his reading materials were unsurprisingly religious, but his library also contained numerous books about chivalric tales, architecture, natural history, medicine, and French history.²⁸⁴ He continued to add to his library over the course of his life. His household records indicate that in 1516, he purchased six additional books to add to his collection and an additional seven books for his son, Henry. Many of his acquisitions came from the presses of Wynkin de Worde, who had been Margaret's printer for fifteen years. This connection back to Margaret strongly suggests that she was the impetus for his scholasticism. Her influence was broad:

²⁸⁰ Tucker, *The Life of Thomas Howard*, 22-23; J. Payne Collier, ed., *Household Books of John Duke of Norfolk, and Thomas Earl of Surrey; Temp. 1481-1490* (London: William Nicol, Shakespeare Press, 1844), xxvii.

²⁸¹ Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 95.

²⁸² Lawrence Stone, "The Educational Revolution in England, 1560-1640," *Past & Present* 28 (July 1964): 41-80.

²⁸³ Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 94.

²⁸⁴ Rawcliffe, 94.

it was alleged that, at her request, Stafford offered 31 acres of land to Queen's College in Cambridge and served as lead benefactor of both Christ's College in Cambridge and St. Paul's School in London, endowing both institutions with large charitable sums.²⁸⁵

From a macro perspective, Stafford's household, relations with the Crown, and displays of wealth reflected a growing shift in the nobility away from martial pursuits to a sedentary lifestyle. To show their wealth and power, the sixteenth-century courtier looked towards bricks, mortar, and a sense of aristocratic refinement demonstrated through grand displays rather than trains of uniformed, armed militias. In this respect, Stafford personifies Gunn's model of the new role of the nobility. His occupation of this place was not his own doing: rather, it was the result of his rearing under the watchful eye of the Tudor regime. This may lead some to question to what extent the Tudors were responsible for the shift, but this focuses excessively on the supposition that Stafford was the forebearer of the shift. Rather, it began before him during the reign of Henry VI as the nobility went to war with itself during the Wars of the Roses. At best, Stafford may be considered a harbinger of the shift, particularly when compared to other nobles. What is interesting about his story is his ultimate downfall at the hands of Henry VIII, who marginally elevated Stafford within the government but then quickly realized that his overt grandness and proximity to the throne had the potential to overshadow the Crown and thus executed him for treason. His death, likely instigated by Henry VIII's new man Cardinal Wolsey, signaled the large-scale surrogation of the nobility by the rising gentry.

²⁸⁵ Rawcliffe, 97.

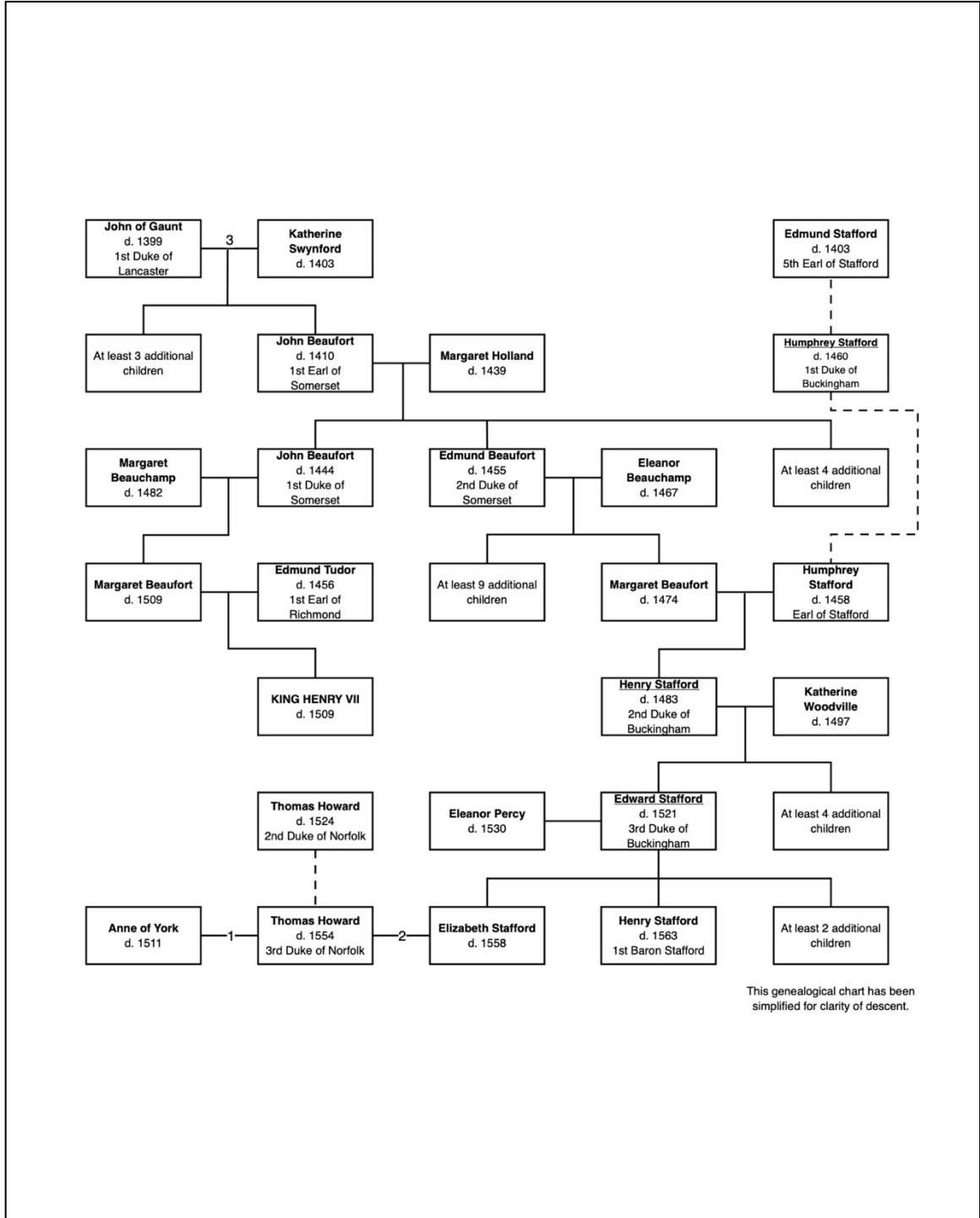


Figure 7. The Beauforts and the Stafford Dukes of Buckingham, 1373–1521.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, 9, 22–23; Cunningham, *Henry VII*, i; Cokayne, et al., *The Complete Peerage of England*, passim.

Chapter V.

Conclusion

John de Vere, Thomas Howard, and Edward Stafford collectively and individually illustrate that the early Tudor nobility was not a monolithic, invariable institution. Rather, it was a heterogeneous establishment experiencing significant change; its heterogeneous nature was the essence of the shift in the nobility that largely saw its influence replaced by the upper gentry. As three of Henry's most prominent noblemen, each of these men's markedly different relationships with the Crown elucidates the diversity of the shift, which itself was not a succinct occurrence but rather was subjective based on a number of factors, including one's relationship with the Crown, lineage, relevant abilities, and resources available. Thus, when examining the shift in detail, one should recognize its thematic character, understanding that it transpired through undefined stages based on the personal relationship each nobleman had with the Crown. By taking into consideration the McFarlanian view of such relationships, one can better account for the particular variations in the shift, lending support to broader thematic conclusions.

De Vere exemplifies the traditional, medieval nobility: his restoration to his position by way of Bosworth and his continued good standing and atypically close personal relationship with Henry were all founded on his continued martial service to the Crown. His lineage was the root of his traditionalism, and his incontestable loyalty to the Tudor dynasty allowed him to avoid the sidelining faced by most other nobles and to continue engaging in activities associated with the nobility. Their relationship was largely

symbiotic: each man was a powerbase in his own right, but cooperating with the other allowed each to further his ambitions. While Henry's reign generally saw a resurgence of royal power and a diminution of noble influence, by and large, the structure of the old order was not significantly uprooted in East Anglia: royal and noble power coexisted and were not antithetical to each other.²⁸⁷ This illustrates that Henry was prepared to give regional power and autonomy to those noblemen he trusted. This stands as a further demonstration of the McFarlanian principle of the importance of personal relationships in terms of power dynamics. De Vere was clearly trusted by Henry: he served him martially in three campaigns after Bosworth, and he used his noble prerogative to ensure that East Anglia remained loyal to the Tudor crown and did not become a center of rebellion and sedition. De Vere's personal weight with the king, the pair's symbiotic relationship, and how de Vere lived all point to the personification of a medieval nobleman. Thus, he illustrates the infancy of the shift in its early stages before the new men supplanted the nobility's influence and while the old institution still played its traditional role in England's government.

De Vere is largely an anachronism of the period, one of the last of the mighty landholders who held power during a reign that saw the vast progression of the shift. As a traditional model of the nobility, he was able to quickly marshal armed affinities to support Henry during uprisings and rebellions. In this way, he illustrates the conventional ethos of the nobility—the provision of chivalric service to one's feudal overlord to defend the realm—and earned Henry's trust and a substantially free hand in administering his lands. As Henry's new men were largely taking over the running of the

²⁸⁷ Ross, *Foremost Man of the Kingdom*, 225–226.

English shires, East Anglia remained dominated by de Vere until his death in 1513. Only thereafter was Henry's son, Henry VIII, able to increase the centralization of his power in the region by more direct contact between the royal court and the East Anglian upper gentry. De Vere's value for study in the context of Henry VII's reign is that he demonstrates the Crown's transition from the late medieval period to the early modern period, showing Henry as *both* the last medieval king and the first early modern one.

If de Vere represents the traditional paradigm of the nobility, then Howard represents the amalgamation between the nobility and the new men. Despite only being elevated in 1483, he was noble, but his recency and his 1485 attainder meant he lacked accumulated wealth on which to rely following his restoration, as possessed by de Vere or Stafford. These circumstances, combined with the need to persuade Henry of his realigned loyalties, made his livelihood wholly dependent on the king's favor. Thus, he was more akin to the new men than he was to the nobility, reliant on holding royal office and providing the king specialized service in exchange for the royal favor he needed to keep his elevated social rank. His life revolved around royal service; in this respect, he demonstrates the increasing importance of servitude in connection with sustaining position and power. He appears to have been proud of his amalgamated rank. The tomb he designed for himself contains depictions of his battle armor and his parliamentary robes, their combined presence symbolizing his connection to both military and royal administration. His epitaph also includes language that honors his labors on behalf of four English kings—though, conspicuously, it skims over his service to Richard III. The significance of Howard in the shift is his demonstration of the increasing subservience of

the nobility to the power of the Crown: he held his position because he earned the king's favor, not by inheritance.

Lastly, Stafford was the most contrastive of the three cases discussed. His condition places him into a category all his own, and he appears more reflective of a sixteenth-century courtier than a medieval noble warrior. His extreme wealth, lack of martial experience or abilities, focus on ostentatious courtly presentation, and lifestyle of sedentary opulence evoke visions of the stationary nobility that was more concerned with the trappings of wealth than hard power. Stafford's life is often used as a bellwether by historians when attempting to define the progress of the shift and to bookend the changeover from the late medieval to the early modern period. On one hand, his presence at major court ceremonies demonstrates the conventional influence of the nobility. On the other, he was purposely excluded from the king's council, a major consideration when recognizing his status as the kingdom's largest landholder. The facts of his life make it clear that reducing the power of the nobility was a central theme of the early Tudors and that members of the nobility did not always acquiesce to their new roles as royal servants.

The three men show that there was no single way to be noble. The shift was in full swing during Henry's reign and applied differently to different members of the nobility based on their personal connections with the king and their particular situations. For de Vere, his stark traditionalism and closeness to the Crown made the shift less applicable to him than it was to Stafford. Notwithstanding his blood proximity, Stafford was largely distant from the power of the Crown, and his influence was largely supplanted by the new men who held the important positions in government that he was denied. Finally, Howard forms the bridge between the two cases; despite being a noble, he was closer to the new

men than the traditional model represented by de Vere. Tellingly, both Henry and his son harbored deep suspicions of the nobility and in particular members of old magnate families who dominated the unruly, peripheral regions of the kingdom. As historians continue to debate the moment of transition from the medieval to the early modern, examining the shift will only confound the argument, as it is evident that there was no single way to be noble during the early Tudor period. The transition did not occur instantaneously at Bosworth, nor did it occur overnight with Henry's death; rather, it occurred gradually over a long period, during which Henry occupied the throne.

The current scholastic status of the shift offers historians an incomplete picture. Given some of its effects, the most obvious question to ask relates to what caused it. Several historians have proffered possible answers, each of which could be categorized into one of three broad, thematic explanations: cultural, financial, and technological. Historians approaching the shift's origins from the cultural perspective tend to examine changes in societal groups and analyze how those changes affected feudal relationships. Those who see the shift as a result of transforming financial pressures are inclined to probe the nobility's financial position vis-à-vis that of the gentry, while scholars who advance a technological argument focus more on the reduced need for conventional feudal service due to the evolution of warfare. While each of these thematic explanations offers headway into what caused the shift, the existing scholarship is siloed to such a degree that it fails to provide a collective comparative analysis of all three themes. This unfortunately impedes each analysis by limiting its respective scope to one specific theme. A new approach that is free of such limitations is needed to properly explore how each of these thematic explanations contributed to the genesis of the shift, but also, more

importantly, how each interacted with—and was affected by—the other themes. By understanding the causes of the consolidation of the Crown's power, one can better understand the foundations of the British constitutional monarchy. As shown, the shift impacted members of the nobility differently throughout Henry's reign; to better complete the picture, it is time to examine the shift's origins with a broad, unconstrained analysis of the available thematic explanations.

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