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SIR WILLIAM STANLEY OF HOLT: POLITICS AND FAMILY ALLEGIANCE IN THE LATE FIFTEENTH CENTURY*

IT is difficult to evaluate the political careers of younger sons. They were often faced with the need to reconcile broader family loyalties with their own concern to establish a separate landed estate (and in some cases a separate title) and to hand it on to their descendants. Such tensions can be seen at work in the case of John Neville in the difficult years 1469-71, when the failure of Edward IV's arrangements to compensate him for the loss of the earldom of Northumberland was as important as any wish to demonstrate his sympathy for the ambitions of his elder brother, Warwick the Kingmaker.¹ Similar complexities emerge in any attempt to assess the significance of Sir William Stanley, the younger brother of Thomas, second Lord Stanley. Recent work on the Bosworth campaign has rightly placed much greater emphasis than hitherto on the assistance received by Henry Tudor from Sir William in the crucial phase of his march, as he crossed from central Wales to the west midlands. William's intervention may well have assisted Henry's entry into Shrewsbury and his subsequent recruitment of followers in Shropshire and Staffordshire. In addition, William Stanley's office of chief justice of north Wales enabled him to assemble a powerful retinue of his own at his castle of Holt: a following which was committed with decisive effect on the field of battle.² How far had he, as a successful and able younger son, been able to exploit the influence and affinity built up by his family over

* I am grateful to Dr. A. D. Carr and Dr. R. E. Horrox for their comments on this article.

¹ According to the chronicle of John Warkworth, Edward IV ' . . . of late tyme hade made hym Markes of Montagu, and yaff a pyes neste to mayntayne his astate withe, wherefor he yaff knoleage to his peple that he wulde holde withe the Erle of Warwyke, his brothere, and take Kynge Edward if he myght . . . ': J. Warkworth, *A Chronicle of the First Thirteen Years of the Reign of King Edward the Fourth*, ed. J. O. Halliwell (Camden Soc., 1839), pp. 10-11. Some examples of conflict of interests between older and younger sons are given in R. A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700* (1984), p. 42.

² R. A. Griffiths and R. S. Thomas, *The Making of the Tudor Dynasty* (Gloucester, 1985), pp. 150-52; M. J. Bennett, *The Battle of Bosworth* (Gloucester, 1985), pp. 170-75. The emphasis on the role of Sir William Stanley before and during Bosworth is one of the themes of the Stanley literary tradition. *The Most Pleasant Song of Lady Bessy* (Percy Soc., XX, 1847) describes how Sir William enabled Henry Tudor to enter Shrewsbury (pp. 34-36), an account made more plausible by the support for Tudor within the town from Sir Richard Corbet, Stanley's step-son: H. Owen and J. B. Blakeway, *A History of Shrewsbury* (2 vols., 1825), I, 248. A significant reference in a later ballad, on the battle of Flodden, ascribes the rivalry between Howards and Stanleys to Sir William's slaying of the duke of Norfolk at Bosworth: *The Stanley Papers*, I (Chetham Soc., XXIX, 1853), 8. The military importance of Stanley's office of chief justice can be seen from the career of William, Lord Herbert, chief justice of south Wales, 1461-68: R. A. Griffiths, *The Principality of Wales in the Later Middle Ages*, I (Cardiff, 1972), 24, 155-56.

several generations, as part of some co-ordinated action by the Stanley family in 1485? Investigation of this theme and of the problems faced by William in securing his own power-base in north Wales and Cheshire throws fresh light on the politics of the Yorkist and early Tudor period.

The royal patronage which allowed William Stanley to acquire his influence in the north-east of Wales and the palatinate of Chester came in two distinct phases. On 1 May 1461 he was appointed chamberlain of Chester and sheriff of Flintshire and constable of Flint castle for life.³ This was a significant grant, for as chamberlain William received the pardons of those in the county who returned to their allegiance after 1461, and served on the most important commissions.⁴ William had already proved his loyalty to the Yorkist cause at the battles of Blore Heath (1459) and Towton (1461), and after the latter he was knighted by Edward IV; he was already a prominent courtier, in close attendance on the king.⁵ But in terms of regional authority, the grant of 1461 was more a recognition of the pre-eminence of his elder brother Thomas, the head of the Stanley family, who had been appointed chief justice in Cheshire for life on 1 January 1462.⁶ The local influence of the Lathom branch of the Stanleys had been well laid earlier in the century by Thomas's and William's grandfather, Sir John Stanley. In the 1420s and '30s, Sir John had built up a powerful system of clientage among local families: he had pursued a vigorous policy of ecclesiastical patronage and frequently acted as arbiter in legal disputes. These activities were consolidated by William's father, Thomas, first Lord Stanley.⁷ Leadership

³ *Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, Thirty-first Report*, p. 246; *Thirty-seventh Report*, p. 679. The profit that could be derived from the office of sheriff in Wales was demonstrated by T. B. Pugh's survey of the career of Sir James Tyrell, sheriff of Glamorgan in the 1470s, in *Glamorgan County History*, III (Cardiff, 1971), 201. The best account of Sir William Stanley's political activities is to be found in J. M. Williams, 'The Stanley family of Lathom and Knowsley c. 1450-1504: a political study' (University of Manchester M.A. thesis, 1979), pp. 118-39.

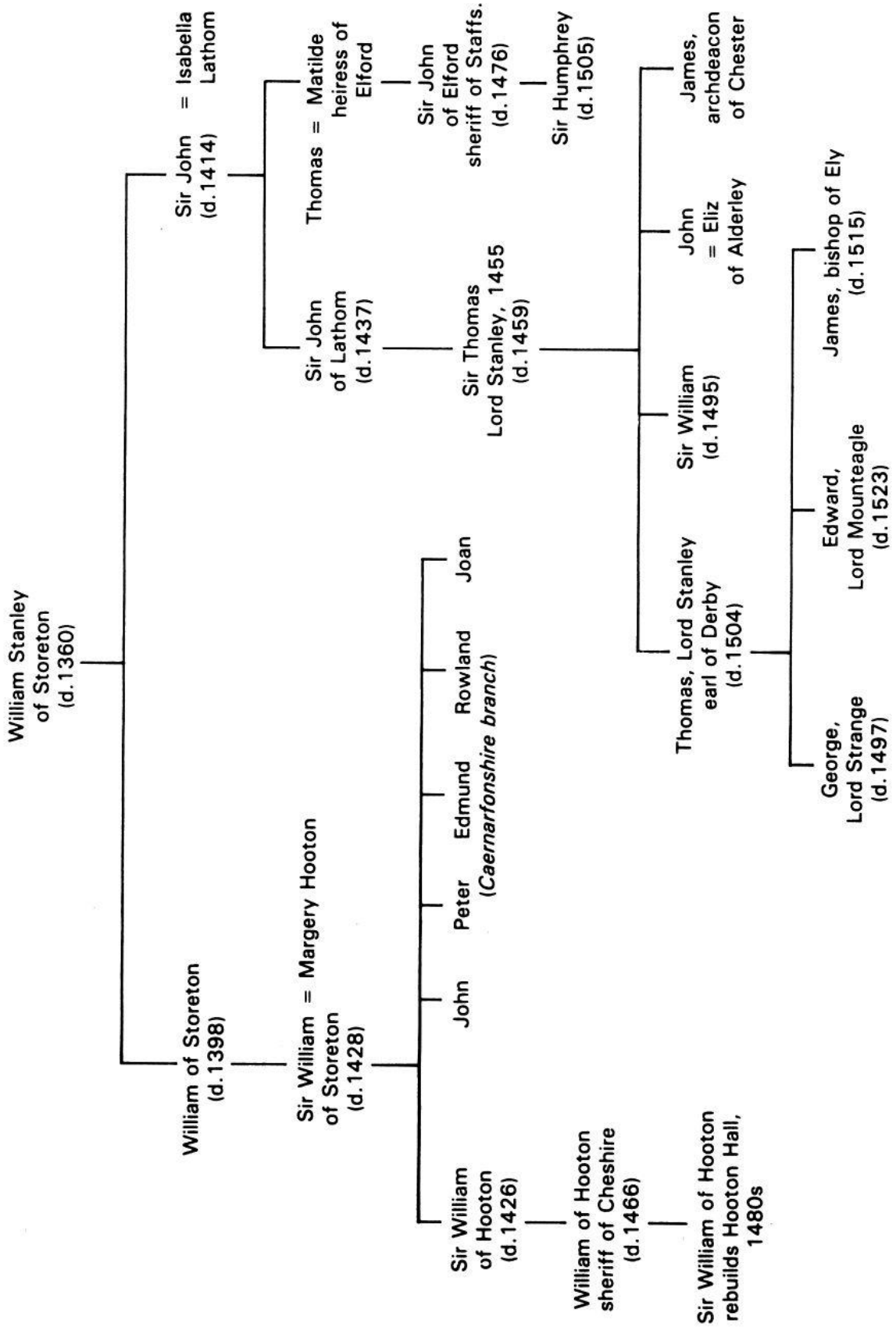
⁴ Cheshire Record Office (henceforth CRO), DVE/AA20 (unclassified deeds), refers to Robert Corbet, who was bound over in recognizances before Sir William Stanley, 27 April 1462; for his pardon, see *CPR, 1461-67*, p. 336. For involvement on the major commissions, see D. J. Clayton, 'The "Cheshire Parliament" in the Fifteenth Century', *Cheshire History*, VI (1980), 21-22.

⁵ A. R. Myers, *The Household of Edward IV* (Manchester, 1959), p. 240.

⁶ *Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, Thirty-seventh Report*, p. 678.

⁷ On Sir John Stanley (d.1437), see M. J. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 215-23, and P. W. Hosker, 'The Stanleys of Lathom and ecclesiastical patronage in the north-west of England during the fifteenth century', *Northern History*, 18 (1982), 212-29. A detailed biography of Thomas, first Lord Stanley is provided in J. S. Roskell, *The Knights of the Shire for the County Palatine of Lancaster, 1377-1460*, (Chetham Soc., XCVI, 1937), pp. 162-72. For an example of his local influence, see the will of Sir Geoffrey Massey of Tatton, who appealed to Stanley to be a 'gode lorde' to his wife and son: W. Fergusson-Irvine, *Lancashire and Cheshire Wills* (Lancs. and Cheshire Record Soc., 30, 1895), p. 14. Geoffrey's son John was to serve as Sir William Stanley's deputy in Cheshire; his daughter Joan was to marry Sir William's son, William (Williams, thesis cited, p. 236).

I. The Stanley Family in the Fifteenth Century



in the community was inherited by the oldest son, along with considerable estates in the county of Chester, as well as the stewardships of Macclesfield and the forest of Delamere.⁸ Influence in north Wales had been more recently acquired when Thomas I, Lord Stanley gained the lordship of Hawarden in Flintshire (1443) and the office of chamberlain of north Wales.⁹ Hawarden castle was often visited by the Stanley household, *en route* from Chester to the south of England. The revenues from Hawarden and Mold provided a useful means of assignment: whether for repair of the Stanleys' Chester properties, the purchase of provisions or for supplying an annuity to Thomas, second Lord Stanley's son, George, Lord Strange.¹⁰ But the importance of northern Wales to the Stanley family has been underestimated, especially in relation to the senior line of the family, the Stanleys of Storeton and Hooton.

This branch of the family had accumulated a landed estate, centred around Great Storeton in the Wirral, between 1330 and 1350. A lordship nexus had been built up through land and office, particularly that of the forestership of the Wirral: this prominence was symbolised by the building of Storeton Hall

⁸ Thomas, second Lord Stanley's Cheshire estates are fully listed in PRO, SC12/6/27. The forestership of Delamere was granted to Sir William Stanley by his older brother in 1473 (CRO, DAR/A/3/5). His prestige in the county was marked by his role as an arbiter in local disputes, such as that concerning the ownership of the manor of Kinderton, to '... be occupiet, taken and hade in such forme as Thomas lord Stanley will appoynte and commaunde' (CRO, DVEI/K1/15). For his increasing prominence in Lancashire arbitrations, see M. K. Jones, 'Richard III and the Stanleys', in *Richard III and the North*, ed. R. Horrox (University of Hull, 1986), pp. 29-30.

⁹ Hawarden had been acquired in fee tail on 15 October 1443, but Stanley ownership was to be jeopardised by an earlier claim on the estate, dating back to 1428. Fictitious legal proceedings between the Stanleys and Richard, earl of Salisbury in 1454 were designed to counter this, but serious difficulties arose on the death of Thomas, first Lord Stanley in 1459. His son lost Hawarden temporarily to Edward, prince of Wales at a time when he was out of favour with the Lancastrians, narrowly escaping attainder in the Coventry parliament. Temporary 'custody' of the castle and lordship was returned to him in 1460, but the matter was to drag on, and Stanley's ownership seems to have been confirmed only in 1464: National Library of Wales (henceforth NLW), Hawarden MS. 14; Liverpool City Library, 920/MOO/1089; R. Stewart-Browne, 'The castles of Hawarden and Mold', *Cheshire Sheaf*, XVII (1920), 80-81. Thomas Stanley was chamberlain of north Wales by 1439 (CPR, 1436-41, p. 286); an extract from his accounts for 1447-48, which included small repairs made to the castles of Caernarfon, Conwy, Beaumaris and Harlech and the enlargement of the garrison at Criccieth, is printed in B. H. St J. O'Neil, 'Criccieth castle, Caernarvonshire', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 98 (1944-45), 50-51.

¹⁰ These comments are based on two receiver's accounts for Hawarden: Liverpool City Library, 920/MOO/1091 (1472-73); Clwyd Record Office, D/DM/426 (1476-77). The steward of the lordships of Hawarden and Mold was Peter Dutton, a close associate of the Stanleys. Peter's father had married Alice Stanley, the younger sister of Thomas, first Lord Stanley. Dutton appears regularly on witness lists and arbitration panels with the Stanleys (CRO, DCH/C/364, 391).

c.1373.¹¹ A late-fourteenth-century marriage to the heiress, Margery Hooton, led to the Stanleys' chief seat being transferred to Hooton in the Wirral. Their standing in fifteenth-century Cheshire was considerable, and was maintained during the Yorkist and early Tudor period: a fine new residence was built for the family at Hooton Hall in the 1480s.¹² Especially significant was the migration of younger members of the family to north-west Wales early in the fifteenth century; there they consolidated a new area of influence. The most successful of these migrants, Sir John Stanley, became constable of Caernarfon castle (1427) and a member of Henry VI's household.¹³ Relations between the senior and junior lines of later medieval families were often far from harmonious. The bitter enmity that divided the main branches of the Neville family sprang from a quarrel over property and its consequences included a struggle for regional influence in the far north. By contrast, evidence suggests that the Stanleys of Storeton and Hooton and the Stanleys of Lathom co-operated amicably and effectively in the fifteenth century.¹⁴ The consequences of this family cohesion were to be seen both in Cheshire and north Wales. In Cheshire members of the Hooton and Lathom

¹¹ W. Fergusson-Irvine, 'The early Stanleys', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* (henceforth *THSLC*), 105 (1953), 46-60. The date for the building of Storeton is based on the research of Dr. Philip Morgan, and substantially revises the traditional view that it was constructed c.1360 on the site of the original Bamville manor: E. W. Cox, 'The antiquities of Storeton, in Wirral', *THSLC*, 49 (1898), 47-70. Dr. Morgan's interpretation of a building contract dated 1372 (BL, Add. Ch. 66294) is that it represents a short but interrupted building programme at Storeton which created a new hall on a new site. If so, it indicates a substantial investment in building and a sign of local power in the Wirral.

¹² G. Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester* (3 vols., 1882), II, 415. For the involvement of the Hooton Stanleys in Henry V's French campaigns as well as local administration, see Shrewsbury Library, Ch. 48; J. T. Driver, *Cheshire in the Later Middle Ages, 1399-1540* (Chester, 1971), pp. 13-15. The career of William Stanley of Hooton (d.1466) has been given a new emphasis in D. J. Clayton, 'The involvement of the gentry in the political, administrative and judicial affairs of the county palatine of Chester, 1442-85' (University of Liverpool Ph.D. thesis, 1980), pp. 207-8. Stanley's close connections with Richard, duke of York (who in an indenture of 1460 promised him the shrievalty of Cheshire) were combined with considerable local activity. Sheriff from 16 January 1463 to his death on 17 February 1466, Dr. Clayton concludes, from a survey of recognizances, jury service and commissions, that he was 'one of the most active members of his class within the palatinate'.

¹³ R. A. Griffiths, 'Patronage, politics and the principality of Wales, 1413-61', in *British Government and Administration*, ed. H. Hearder and H. R. Loyn (Cardiff, 1974), pp. 75, 81.

¹⁴ See, for example, a recognizance between William Stanley esquire of Hooton and his son, and Thomas de Pull, 24 March 1455: both sides agreed to abide by the award of Sir Thomas Stanley (Ormerod, II, 421). For Sir Thomas Stanley assisting the Hooton Stanleys in the transfer of some of their property around Storeton, see John Rylands University Library (henceforth *JRL*) Ch. 1447. The connection was strengthened in the next generation. Sir William Stanley of Hooton was feoffee for Thomas, second Lord Stanley in 1482; he had been knighted by Stanley on the Scottish campaign: St John's College, Cambridge, archives, D56/188; W. A. Shaw, *The Knights of England* (2 vols., 1906), II, 17-19.

lines of the family worked together in the administration of the palatinate.¹⁵ Similar contacts were maintained in north Wales. In the case of one of the Welsh branches of the Hooton Stanleys, the Stanleys of Ewloe (Flintshire), the link was strengthened by their close proximity to Hawarden itself.¹⁶ The Lathom Stanleys were also to benefit from the patronage network built up by the Hooton younger sons, particularly in north-west Wales, a theme which will be explored later.

Despite these family connections, there is no evidence that at this stage Edward IV saw Sir William Stanley's future as concentrated primarily in this part of the north-west. On the contrary, in the early part of the reign an alternative, and at this stage more promising, sphere of influence was being opened up in Yorkshire, where Sir William was granted the lordship of Skipton on 1 February 1462 and was appointed regularly to commissions of the peace in the west riding.¹⁷ William served with Warwick at the siege of Alnwick in the winter of 1462 and such co-operation with the Nevilles may have facilitated his first marriage, in about 1465, to Joan, the widow of John, Lord Lovell, since Warwick had custody of the Lovell heir, Francis.¹⁸ Stanley's brother Thomas had married Warwick's sister Eleanor, and Neville patronage had already secured William the stewardship of the priory of Durham's cell at Lytham (Lancs.). It was only later, after the king's rift with the Nevilles in the late 1460s, that Stanley began to concentrate his attention on north Wales. On 29 September 1469 he was appointed constable of the castles of Rhuddlan, Caernarfon and Beaumaris: and on 14 February 1470 he became steward of Denbigh for life.¹⁹

¹⁵ Clayton, thesis cited, p. 237. The marriage between William Stanley of Hooton and Agnes Grosvenor in 1470 (JRL Ch. 1678) forged contacts with families associated with the Lathom Stanleys. The Grosvenor estates were divided between five daughters, whose husbands included the Duttons of Hatton and the Egertons (Clayton, thesis cited, pp. 252-53).

¹⁶ Peter Stanley of Ewloe was a brother of William Stanley of Hooton (d.1426). His marriage to Margaret Heighleigh brought him estates in Caernarfonshire and Flintshire. His son was deputy sheriff for Sir William Stanley in Flintshire from 1461; his grandson was appointed sheriff of Merioneth and constable of Harlech castle by Henry VII in 1485. Thomas, second Lord Stanley had been granted the lordship of Ewloe in 1462; Peter Stanley held the farm of the lordship and castle: *DKR, Thirty-seventh Report*, p. 678; NLW MS. 1117E; T. B. Davies-Cooke, 'Ewloe castle', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (henceforth *Arch. Camb.*), 46 (1891), 6-7; H. J. F. Vaughan, 'Sir William Stanley', *Arch. Camb.*, 38 (1885), 69.

¹⁷ *CPR, 1461-67*, pp. 115-16, 577.

¹⁸ *CPR, 1461-67*, p. 474, mentioning Stanley and Joan, widow of John, Lord Lovell, 'whom he will shortly marry' (12 November 1465). For the suggestion of Neville influence, through Warwick's own wardship of the Lovell heir, Francis, see Williams, thesis cited, p. 123. William Stanley's stewardship of the priory of Durham's cell at Lytham (Lancs.) from 1461 had been the direct result of Neville intervention: Durham, Prior's Kitchen, *Registum Parvum* iii, f. 96 (which I owe to Dr. M. A. Hicks).

¹⁹ Williams, thesis cited, p. 125.

The close association with Edward IV's administration was clearly perceived by contemporaries, and during the Re-adeption William's residence at Nantwich was ransacked by Lancastrian partisans: his servants were beaten and plate and jewels stolen. After Sir William's active support for Edward IV on the king's return in 1471, further patronage was assured. William had been one of the first to rally to Edward, bringing his men to Nottingham in mid-March 1471: he was made a knight banneret at Tewkesbury (5 May).²⁰ A profitable second marriage to Elizabeth Hopton, the widow of the earl of Worcester, which had been arranged by December 1471, almost certainly was a consequence of his renewed prominence at the Yorkist court.²¹ Fresh offices in Wales culminated, early in Richard III's reign, in the post of chief justice of north Wales (November 1483).²² Again it is necessary to ask how far William's position as a royal officer was based on his family's power in the region. Some preliminary observations need to be made.

The members of the Stanley family co-operated closely with one another, as is shown in a letter of James Stanley, archdeacon of Cheshire, written from Liverpool in the early 1480s²³:

Worshipful sir, I commend me to you. And as for ye mater betwene maysterson and marchumley, hit was put to my dome so that hit were geven affor the thurrsday next afftur oure lady day last past And as ye case ys soo that my lord rydes to the kyng in short space And hath send to me all excuses layd apart to be with hym this day at Lathom And that ys ye cause that I may not come to Chestershire at this tyme. Therffur I pray you will labour to the partyes yff they wyll abyde the dome of my broder chamberlayn . . .

Here James, about to accompany Thomas, Lord Stanley, simply refers an important arbitration award to his brother William. William was himself often involved as an arbiter in such disputes alongside his brothers: in July 1484 he, Thomas and James gave an award between John Mainwaring of Peover and Edmund Trafford.²⁴ In May 1472 he acted as an arbiter with Sir

²⁰ For the attack on Stanley's residence at Nantwich on 7 November 1470 (described in garbled fashion in *Cheshire Sheaf*, XXII, 14), see Clayton, thesis cited, pp. 146-47. For his support for Edward IV in 1471, see Warkworth, p. 14; Shaw, *Knights of England*, II, 15-16.

²¹ Stanley's first wife had died on 5 August 1466 (*CP*, VIII, 223). The first reference to the match occurs on 7 December 1471, when Stanley and Elizabeth Hopton were allowed entry to the possessions of the late earl of Worcester during the minority of his heir, Edward (*CPR*, 1467-77, p. 297). The marriage was important to Sir William, and the connection with comital rank a source of pride as well as profit. The Worcester insignia is prominent in the inventory of plate taken at Holt (*PRO*, E154/2/5); for one example of Stanley's vigilance over the landed rights of his wife, see *PRO*, CP40/905/308.

²² *CPR*, 1476-85, p. 368.

²³ BL, Add. MS. 34815, f. 5.

²⁴ Lancashire Record Office (henceforth LRO), DDTr, 2/3/158.

John Savage and Sir William Harrington in the argument between his brother James Stanley and Thomas Molyneux over the right of presentment to the church at Walton; and he similarly intervened between his nephew John Stanley and his own retainers, the Warburtons, in a dispute over property in Aldford.²⁵ Too much should not be made of this kind of evidence, but it suggests that the Stanleys enjoyed a family solidarity above the ordinary.

An interesting illustration of this is provided by a receiver's account for Thomas Stanley's lordship of Hawarden for 1472-73. It records Lord Stanley and his second wife, Margaret Beaufort, countess of Richmond, staying at the castle for four days in September 1472. They were accompanied by all three of Stanley's brothers, William, James and John. One item in the account is revealing: a payment for the keeping of the daughters of Sir John Harrington at Holt castle. Thomas Stanley had managed to obtain custody of the Harrington heiresses from their uncle, Sir James Harrington, after a protracted legal struggle. As the dispute between the two had still not been resolved, and Sir James was still defiantly occupying Hornby castle, it was evidently deemed prudent to transfer the girls to north-east Wales. Sir William's position as steward of Denbigh and agent of the lords of Bromfield and Yale allowed them to be moved to the security of Holt castle.²⁶

The effectiveness of seeking collective support from various members of the Stanley family had long been recognized. Sir Lawrence Warren strengthened his hold on the Cheshire manors of Stopford, Bradbury, Henbury and Woodford through a marriage alliance with Sir John Stanley of Lathom and a gift of land to Thomas Stanley of Elford. William Chauntrell, a serjeant-at-law with close connections with the Stanleys, was retained with an annuity of 20 marks for his counsel in the suits of rival claimants to the properties. For Otewell Worsley, in a parliamentary petition dating from the early 1440s, it was the combined influence of the Stanleys in east Cheshire that had assisted the Warrens in wrongfully keeping possession of the estates. His own attempts at recovery had been blocked by 'divers persons of grete myght, as well in goods as in alliaunce'.²⁷

²⁵ LRO, DDM, 17/58; JRL, Tatton Ch. 445.

²⁶ The account roll is Liverpool City Library, 920/MOO/1091. Sir William Stanley's position as agent of the lords of Bromfield and Yale is shown in NLW, Hawarden MS. 16; he had been appointed steward of Denbigh for life on 14 February 1470 (*CPR*, 1467-77, p. 183). The Harrington-Stanley dispute is fully discussed in Jones, 'Richard III and the Stanleys', pp. 37-42. For an earlier reference to John Stanley residing with his brother Thomas at Knowsley, see R. Sharpe France, 'A Stanley account roll, 1460', *THSLC*, 113 (1961), 207.

²⁷ CRO, DVE/2401/68; J. P. Earwaker, *East Cheshire* (2 vols., 1890), II, 276-77. Sir Lawrence Warren's oldest son had married Isabel, daughter of Sir John Stanley of Lathom. I am grateful to Miss Elizabeth Danbury for drawing my attention to this information.

The picture of an alliance of family power can be observed also in the petition of William Tatton (*temp.* Richard III), concerning a dispute with the sheriff of Chester over the farm of the advowries. He appealed to the 'goode lordeshipp' of both Thomas and William Stanley.²⁸ It is also portrayed in an impressive roll-call of the property in north Wales held by the two Stanleys towards the end of the Yorkist period, as recorded in the *Song of Lady Bessy*:

And Harden lands under your hands,
 And Moules dale under your fee,
 Your brother Sir William Stanley by parliament,
 The Holt Castle who gave him truely?
 Who gave him Brom-field, that I now ment?
 Who gave him Chirk-land to his fee?
 Who made him High Chamberlain of Cheshire?²⁹

A similar theme of co-operation can be traced through the badges of the wolf's head and garter, adjoining the legs of Man and eagle's talon, at the shrine of St Winifred's at Holywell, which was extensively re-built early in the reign of Henry VII. The cult of St Winifred's combined the interests of Henry VII's court circle with the Stanley's own regional influence. Profiles of Thomas Stanley and Margaret Beaufort, two of the chief benefactors, can be found high in the ceiling of the crypt to the right of the well. The part played by Sir William in the new work at Holywell is revealed by his heraldic devices. The wolf's head (the arms of the earls of Chester) was adopted briefly by William in the late 1480s, surrounded by the garter received by him early in the reign of Richard III. Next to it is a *rebus* of his wife. Elizabeth Hopton: a tun with a plant issuing out of it.³⁰ Both William and his officers and servants had contributed to other restoration work at Holt, Gresford and Denbigh.³¹ Yet the impressive renewal of churches in Flintshire and Denbighshire at the end of the fifteenth century was primarily derived from the territorial power and interests of Thomas, Lord Stanley and his wife, Margaret Beaufort. The profusion of their devices on churches at Mold, Hope and Wrexham was a celebration of landed might, similar to the large-scale building work undertaken by Edmund Grey of Ruthin in the latter

²⁸ JRL, Tatton Ch. 444. In 1461 the Cheshire gentleman John Brindley put his lands in trust to Sir William Stanley, and paid him 10 marks, to maintain 'his right and defend hym of anie wrong'. For this and other images of the Stanleys as local protectors, see Jones, 'Richard III and the Stanleys', pp. 27-30; M. J. Bennett, 'The Stanleys of Lathom in English politics, 1385-1485', *History Today* (1981), pp. 15-16.

²⁹ 'The Most Pleasant Song of Lady Bessy', ed. J. O. Halliwell, *Percy Soc.*, XX (1847), iv, 1-2.

³⁰ C. David, *St Winefride's Well — An Illustrated Description* (1971); M. Lowry, 'St Winifred, Caxton and the Lady Margaret', *The Library*, 6th series, V (1983), 114-17.

³¹ F. H. Crossley, 'Screens, lofts and stalls situated in Wales and Monmouthshire', *Arch. Camb.*, 99 (1946-47), 25, 45-46.

part of the fifteenth century in the nearby lordship of Dyffryn Clwyd.³² William's own acquisition of a substantial estate in the region represented a precarious and difficult story, worthy of more detailed consideration.

Sir William Stanley obtained his first major foothold in north Wales as late as 1475 when, in an exchange arranged with Richard, duke of Gloucester before Edward IV's French campaign, his lordship of Skipton was surrendered for that of Chirk.³³ The lordship of Chirk was important to William, and the antiquarian John Leland describes many repairs and improvements made by him to the castle.³⁴ This exchange confirmed Stanley's area of interest in the north-west, and was demonstrated by his frequent appearances during the late 1470s and early 1480s at Chester, Flint and Shrewsbury.³⁵ The most substantial of William's Welsh properties, the lordship of Bromfield and Yale, was acquired at the very end of the Yorkist period, on 10 December 1484. Once again, it was obtained by an exchange, this time with the crown, and involved the lordship of Thornbury (which William had received after Buckingham's rebellion in 1483) as well as a cash payment to the king.³⁶ Bromfield and Yale formed one of the largest lordships in north Wales, valued at over £700 a year. Its administrative centre was Holt castle, which was extensively improved by Stanley, including the conversion of the exchequer into a strong square tower of two stories.³⁷ It was from the new exchequer at 'our castle of Holt' that he wrote, as lord of Bromfield and Yale, to the rhaglaws of Burton in May 1490, concerning the delivery of property to one of his tenants.³⁸ The evidence from the account rolls of the lordship indicates some internal administrative re-organization by

³² For an attempt to reconstruct the glasswork of the north window at Mold, completed by Thomas Stanley's receiver, Robert Lloyd, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, see W. Bell Jones, 'Ancient stained and painted glass in Flintshire', *Flintshire Historical Society Journal*, XI (1921), 76-78. For the background to these benefactions, see D. R. Thomas, *The History of the Diocese of St Asaph* (3 vols., Oswestry, 1908-13), I, 70; II, 192-93; III, 243-55, 259-65, 290-304. A comparison with the lordship of Dyffryn Clwyd is provided by R. I. Jack, 'Religious life in a Welsh marcher lordship: the lordship of Dyffryn Clwyd in the later middle ages', in *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society*, ed. C. M. Barron and C. Harper-Bill (1985), pp. 155-56.

³³ D. A. L. Morgan, 'The king's affinity in the polity of Yorkist England', *TRHS*, fifth series, 23 (1973), 19.

³⁴ 'Some records of Chirk in three centuries', *Arch. Camb.*, 78 (1923), 422.

³⁵ For wine given to Stanley by the town of Shrewsbury in 1482, see Shropshire Record Office, 3365/418; for him witnessing a grant of land to his deputy, Thomas Salisbury, at Flint, alongside John and William Warburton, NLW, Chirk MS. 11347.

³⁶ The full text of the grant of Bromfield and Yale is given in *Arch. Camb.*, 37 (1882), 150-52. Details of the exchange are referred to in a later petition of Stanley's (*RP*, VI, 317); Thornbury was back in royal hands by January 1485 (*CPR*, 1476-85, p. 521).

³⁷ A. Palmer, 'The town of Holt, Denbighshire', *Arch. Camb.*, 62 (1907), 21-22, 396-97. The valor of the lordship (1495) is Longleat MS. 682 (which I owe to Dr. R. E. Horrox).

³⁸ Clwyd Record Office, D/PT/ 1016.

Sir William, including that of the manor and township of Cobham.³⁹ Early in the Tudor period there are suggestions of William's interests at this local level: his arbitration in a dispute involving his servants, the Flintshire Hanmers, and the arrangement of the marriage of his daughter Catherine to Thomas Cocat of Holt.⁴⁰

William's possession of Bromfield and Yale would have been particularly satisfying, because its acquisition was the culmination of a long period of association with the lordship. His first role there seems to have been as agent for his older brother, acting on behalf of Thomas's first wife, Eleanor Neville, in relation to lands held by her in Bromfield. In 1461 William drew up an indenture with one of her servants, Piers Warburton.⁴¹ This marked the start of a long friendship between William and the Cheshire family, a connection strengthened by Piers's second marriage in 1469 to Ellen Savage, daughter of Sir John Savage, William Stanley's nephew.⁴² Stanley soon came to be regarded as an effective force in the marches, where a lord's jurisdiction was largely unchallenged by the royal courts. In 1467 the co-owners of the lordship, Lord Abergavenny and the duke of Norfolk, appointed him their commissioner and councillor, engaging him to hold a meeting of the great court at Holt to effect major improvements in the running of the property.⁴³ After 1476, when the lands reverted to the crown, William was appointed the king's steward there.⁴⁴ In the circumstances, it is scarcely surprising that he speedily occupied the lordship following Richard III's grant. Evidence shows him active in Flintshire in December 1484, and according to the *Song of Lady Bessy* he left Holt with his retinue to join Henry Tudor before the battle of Bosworth in August 1485.⁴⁵

³⁹ This later evidence is discussed in D. Pratt, 'Fourteenth-century Bromfield and Yale', *Denbighshire Historical Society Transactions*, XXVII (1978), 115-16.

⁴⁰ NLW, Bettisfield MS. 268; J. Hanmer, *A Memorial of the Parish and Family of Hanmer in Flintshire* (1876), pp. 56-58; *DNB*, LIV (1898), 82.

⁴¹ JRL, Arley Ch. 9/7 (27 October 1461). For an earlier letter from Eleanor Neville to Piers Warburton concerning estate business, see *ibid.*, 30/2.

⁴² A dispensation for Piers's second marriage to Ellen Savage in 1469 is to be found in JRL, Arley Ch. 26/2. In 1485 Piers, described as a servant of Sir William Stanley, had his possession of the advowries of Caernarfonshire and Anglesey confirmed by Henry VII; his son, John Warburton, was to marry Stanley's daughter, Joan (RP, VI, 353; *DNB*, *loc. cit.*).

⁴³ NLW, Hawarden MS. 16; extracts printed in *Arch. Camb.*, 2 (1847), 147-52, 210-15, 335-38; 3 (1848), 66-68, 107-9.

⁴⁴ Sir William Stanley is described as steward of Bromfield and Yale on 10 July 1480: University College of North Wales (henceforth UCNW), Mostyn MS. 1540. For a description of the estate in the last year of its division between the Mowbrays and Lords Abergavenny, see D. Pratt, 'Bromfield and Yale: a fragmentary account roll 1475-6', *Denbighshire Hist. Soc. Tr.*, 28 (1979), 104-14.

⁴⁵ NLW, Hawarden MS. 17; 'Song of Lady Bessy', p. 8.

The early years of Henry VII's reign confirmed William's standing in the region. He presided over the sessions at Caernarfon and Beaumaris, and received further grants of land, particularly in Cheshire.⁴⁶ But the cornerstone of his power-base, Bromfield and Yale, was threatened by some doubt as to the right of reversion to William, Lord Berkeley of half the estates. The moiety had been made over to Richard, duke of York by Lord Berkeley on 28 May 1476. It had consequently devolved to the crown under Richard III, despite the previous arrangement that if the prince died the property would be restored to Berkeley's own estate.⁴⁷ Stanley was to petition parliament in 1485 and 1488 to secure confirmation of his full title, mentioning the exchange of other lands of great value, his large cash payments to Richard III and his lack of knowledge of the Berkeley claim on his estates. In 1490 he enfeoffed this portion of the lands.⁴⁸ Some sort of private compromise was reached with William, Lord Berkeley.⁴⁹ These arrangements may have been sufficient to secure the entire estate during Stanley's own lifetime, but it certainly did not guarantee his descendants an untroubled succession, especially in view of Berkeley's dispute with other members of his own family. The establishment of a regional position for his children was certainly one of William's preoccupations during this period: his own son was introduced to a succession of offices in Cheshire and Flintshire in the period 1489-94.⁵⁰ But the problems over Bromfield and Yale,

⁴⁶ Stanley's position as chief justice of north Wales was confirmed on 2 February 1486: *Materials for a history of the reign of Henry VII*, ed. W. Campbell (2 vols., 1873), I, 258-59, 271. Grants of lands in Cheshire include the confiscated estates of Lord Lovell (1489) and the manor of Frodsham (1490): *CPR, 1485-94*, pp. 263, 301. For his judicial activity, see NLW, Nannau-Hengwrt MS. 17; Bettisfield MS. 1568; D. W. Williams, 'Llys Bodychen', *Anglesey Antiquarian Society Transactions* (1966), pp. 54-55; J. Beverley Smith, 'North Wales in the reign of Henry Tudor', ante, 3 (1966-67), 163-64. For repair work by Stanley to the castles of Chester, Rhuddlan and Flint, see PRO, E101/488, m. 11-12.

⁴⁷ J. Smyth, *The Lives of the Berkeleys*, ed. Sir J. Maclean (3 vols., Gloucester, 1883-85), II, 118-20, 126-27. Berkeley ceded the estates to Richard III in tale male, with remainder to himself, in return for an annuity. They had been occupied by the crown by 11 January 1484: *British Library, Harleian Manuscript 433*, ed. R. Horrox & P. W. Hammond (4 vols., Gloucester, 1979-84), II, 73-74.

⁴⁸ *RP*, VI, 317, 417; *CCR, 1485-1500*, p. 136.

⁴⁹ Berkeley Castle Muniments, General Ch. 4451 (19 February 1486), by which William Berkeley conceded his share of the lordship to Stanley, I am grateful to Mr. D. Smith of Gloucestershire County Record Office and to the Trustees of the Berkeley Castle muniments for allowing me access to this document. For the plausible suggestion that Berkeley surrendered his rights in return for the benefits of the patronage Stanley had at his disposal as king's chamberlain, see Smyth, *Lives of the Berkeleys*, II, 127-30.

⁵⁰ Driver, *Cheshire in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 118.

together with his failure to gain an hereditary title,⁵¹ brought into sharp relief the divergence between broader family success and a lack of security for William's own lineage.

The main features of Sir William Stanley's acquisition of his landed estate in north Wales and Cheshire deserve to be rehearsed. His good fortune occurred relatively late in the Yorkist period, and at considerable cost. Yet, it did not enable him to construct a territorial connection until early in the Tudor period, and even then uncertainties remained over the long-term future of some of his estates. Sir William was clearly an effective and able royal officer in Cheshire, Flintshire and Denbighshire for much of the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III. But a question hangs over his amassing of a substantial retinue in north Wales in the weeks before Bosworth: to what extent was this due to office rather than to a more stable system of allegiances created by his family? A study of the backgrounds of those retained by William add a new dimension to the role of the wider Stanley nexus.

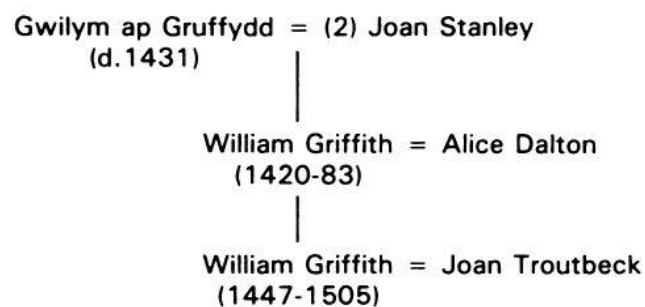
One of Sir William Stanley's most important associates in the government of north Wales was Sir William Griffith, who served regularly with him on commissions in the area and had been appointed chamberlain of north Wales by Richard III early in 1484.⁵² He was closely connected with William Stanley in the routine of administration, and was viewed with suspicion by Richard III in the months preceding Bosworth. The connections of his family with the Stanleys went back to the beginning of the fifteenth century. The marriage of Sir William Griffith's grandfather to Joan Stanley, daughter of Sir William Stanley of Hooton, marked the revival of the family's influence after Glyndŵr's rebellion. The marriage negotiations were concluded by a settlement in which Gwilym ap Gruffydd promised, in May 1413, the Hooton

⁵¹ Sir William Stanley's failure to gain a peerage after his intervention at Bosworth was commented on by T. B. Pugh, 'The magnates, knights and gentry', in *Fifteenth Century England, 1399-1509*, ed. S. B. Chrimes, C. D. Ross and R. A. Griffiths (Manchester, 1972), p. 115. S. B. Chrimes, *Henry VII* (1972), p. 55, also pointed out that William's older brother Thomas, who was created earl of Derby and granted substantial estates in Lancashire, was the principal beneficiary of Henry VII's patronage. Sir William's possible ambition for the earldom of Chester is discussed below. In the recent past two younger aristocratic sons had received earldoms specifically for military service. Edmund Beaufort had been created earl of Dorset by Henry VI as a reward for his defence of Calais against the Burgundians in 1436. John Neville had been granted the earldom of Northumberland by Edward IV after his rout of the Lancastrians at Hexham in 1464.

⁵² Williams, thesis cited, p. 241. For fees of justice delivered from Griffith to Stanley in May 1484, see UCNW, Uncatalogued Penrhyn MS. I am grateful to the archivist at the University College of North Wales, Mr. T. Roberts, for letting me consult this recently acquired material. For the comment on William Griffith by Tudur Penllyn, 'captain and chief of Caernarvon', see K. Williams-Jones, 'Caernarvon', in *The Boroughs of Medieval Wales*, ed. R. A. Griffiths (Cardiff, 1978), p. 92.

branch of the Stanleys 2,000 marks.⁵³ The significance of this, a second marriage, for the family fortunes was clearly perceived by Gwilym ap Gruffydd himself. An entail drawn up in October 1413 ensured that his son by his first wife should inherit only his mother's property at Penmynydd in Anglesey, while his son by Joan would receive his own extensive estates in Caernarfonshire and Anglesey.⁵⁴

II. Griffiths of Penrhyn



Gwilym's son William (1420-83) was placed under the tutelage of his Stanley kinsmen before he came of age. This association enabled him to receive letters of denizenship in 1440, and three years later the ban on the Welsh-born holding office was removed on the grounds that his mother was a Stanley.⁵⁵ It also accelerated William Griffith's accumulation of a major landed estate in north-west Wales. Griffith's acquisition of the Dinorwig properties in Caernarfonshire provides one important example of this. John Stanley had been granted in 1448 the wardship of Nicholas Saxton, grandson of the original recipient of Dinorwig, with reversion of his lands. Nicholas died without issue and the estate descended, on John Stanley's own death, through Joan Stanley to her son William Griffith.⁵⁶ The importance of this

⁵³ UCNW, Uncatalogued Penrhyn MS. For the background to Gwilym's rehabilitation after the revolt, and the accumulation of estates in 1407-13, see G. Roberts, 'Wyrion Eden', *Anglesey Antiq. Soc. Tr.* (1951), pp. 68-70; A. D. Carr, *Medieval Anglesey* (Denbigh, 1982), pp. 207-8.

⁵⁴ UCNW, Penrhyn MS. 11; J. R. Jones, 'The development of the Penrhyn estate to 1431' (University of Wales M.A. thesis, 1955), pp. 213-15.

⁵⁵ K. Williams-Jones, 'Caernarvon', p. 91. William Griffith's wardship had been granted to John, Rowland and Joan Stanley (UCNW, Penrhyn MSS. 16-17). A useful comparison can be made with the career of Gruffydd ap Nicholas in Carmarthenshire. Gruffydd had secured letters of denizenship and a lifting of the ban on office-holding by March 1437; this paved the way for a highly successful career as deputy justiciar of south Wales: R. A. Griffiths, *Wales and the Marches*, in *Fifteenth-Century England*, p. 151.

⁵⁶ T. Jones Pierce, 'Notes on the history of rural Caernarvonshire in the reign of Elizabeth', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, II (1940), 12-14.

marriage alliance is clear, and it was later stressed by the poet Guto'r Glyn as being the main explanation for the rise of the family.⁵⁷

William Griffith's own marriage, to Alice, daughter and heiress of Sir Richard Dalton of Apthorp (Northants.), in 1447 strengthened the Stanley link through a closer connection with the Lathom branch of the family. Alice was the granddaughter of Isabel Pilkington, by her second marriage. Isabel's daughter by her first marriage to Thomas de Lathom had brought Lathom and Knowsley to the Stanleys.⁵⁸ In August 1449 Thomas Stanley arbitrated in William Griffith's favour in a dispute with Robert Dalton over the right of Griffith's wife to part of the Dalton estates; Griffith was subsequently to enfeoff the Lancashire portion, including the manor of Bispham, to Stanley.⁵⁹ In 1450 Griffith acted as deputy to Thomas Stanley in his post of chamberlain of north Wales, and he assisted Stanley's efforts to oppose Richard, duke of York's landing at Beaumaris.⁶⁰ By this stage, the Griffith family closely identified their rise in fortune to the Stanley link. In the late 1430s William Griffith undertook the rebuilding of Penrhyn castle, which included the prominent display of the Stanley arms impaled with his own.⁶¹ The association was to be broadened in the 1460s. William Griffith's service under Lord Hastings, the chamberlain of north Wales in the early Yorkist period, led to contacts with the Staffordshire branch of the family, the Stanleys of Elford.⁶²

The Stanley connection was consolidated by Griffith's son. William Griffith II (c.1447-1505) married Joan Troutbeck of Bewsey (Cheshire). Joan's mother was Margaret, daughter of Sir Thomas Stanley (1406-59), and so Griffith became a nephew by marriage of Thomas II, Lord Stanley. His appointment as chamberlain of north Wales early in 1484 enhanced Stanley power in the region. The connection was certainly known to Richard III, who acted accordingly once he became suspicious of the Stanleys. A poem by Lewis Môn tells how, before Bosworth, Griffith was imprisoned by Richard at Nottingham, along with George, Lord Strange. Tudur Aled also refers to

⁵⁷ J. Gwynfor Jones, 'Government and the Welsh community: the north-east borderland in the fifteenth-century', in *British Government and Administration*, pp. 65-66.

⁵⁸ They were married by 1 April 1447, when a gift of land to the couple at Beaumaris was witnessed by Sir Thomas Stanley and William Bulkeley: UCNW, Uncatalogued Penrhyn MS.

⁵⁹ UCNW, Uncatalogued Penrhyn MS.

⁶⁰ R. A. Griffiths, 'Richard, duke of York, and the royal household in Wales', *Welsh History Review*, 8 (1976), 17.

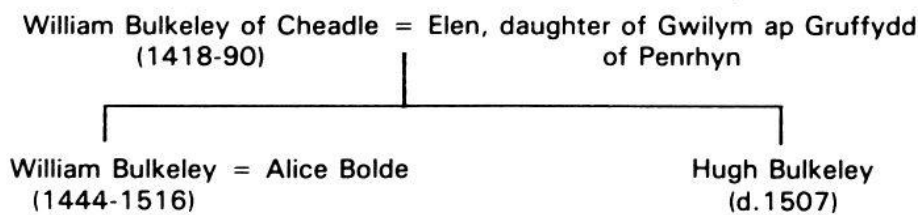
⁶¹ D. B. Hague, 'Penrhyn Castle', *Tr. Caernarvonshire Hist. Soc.*, 20 (1959), 32. He had received a licence to build a turret and battlement on 10 May 1438 (UCNW, Penrhyn MSS. 20-22).

⁶² W. H. Dunham, *Lord Hastings' Indentured Retainers, 1461-83* (Connecticut, 1955), pp. 118, 122.

this family crisis.⁶³ It was Griffith's kinsman, William Griffith of Cochwillan, a servant of William Stanley, who was able to provide Henry Tudor with armed support at Bosworth: he was afterwards rewarded with the office of sheriff of Caernarfonshire.⁶⁴ Margaret Troutbeck's own son and heir, William Troutbeck of Bewsey, also supported the Stanleys at the battle.

The Griffiths' strong links with the Stanleys encouraged others of their acquaintance to forge similar alliances. Most prominent were the Bulkeleyes, a Cheshire family which had migrated to Beaumaris in the early fifteenth century. William Bulkeley had married Elen, daughter of Gwilym ap Gruffydd, and the close co-operation between the two families seems to have inspired a similar policy of arranged marriages, with two of the Bulkeley sons marrying kinswomen of Thomas, first Lord Stanley.⁶⁵ Following the example of William Griffith, William Bulkeley also petitioned to have the ban on Welsh-born office-holders removed (1444), as he was married to 'Ellen, daughter of Gwilym ap Griffith, English on her mother's side, that is daughter to William Stanley knight'. By 1448 he had secured the post of serjeant-at-arms in north Wales for life, while his lands were to be considerably augmented by the acquisition, after 1453, of the Bolde estates in the Conwy valley.⁶⁶ In an ode to Hugh Bulkeley, Guto'r Glyn praised this prestigious Stanley connection.⁶⁷ It certainly led to the same pattern of family service. William Bulkeley I supported Thomas Stanley against York in 1450; Bulkeley's son served as commissioner with Sir William Stanley in 1475 and 1478, and acted as his deputy in the constablerships of Conwy and Beaumaris castles.⁶⁸

III. Bulkeleyes of Beaumaris



⁶³ *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography* (1959), p. 1125. Similar references to the plight of Griffith occur in a *cywydd* of Hywel Rheinallt, describing how he was imprisoned at the same time as Lord Strange, 'at the mercy of King Richard, a man who is cruel to a prisoner': E. W. Jones, *Bosworth Field and its Preliminaries — a Welsh Retrospect* (Liverpool, 1984), pp. 56-59.

⁶⁴ *DWB*, p. 1154.

⁶⁵ D. C. Jones, 'The Bulkeleyes of Beaumaris, 1440-1547', *Anglesey Antiq. Soc. Tr.* (1961), p. 4.

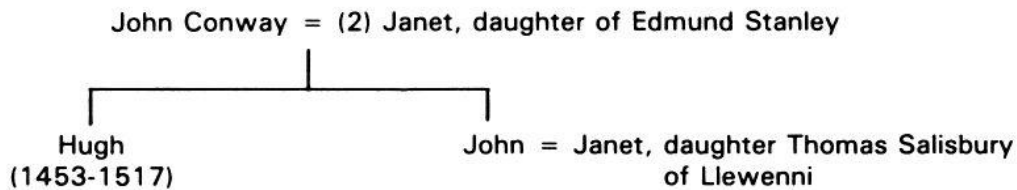
⁶⁶ *Calendar of Ancient Petitions Relating to Wales*, ed. W. Rees (Cardiff, 1975), pp. 146-47; Griffiths, 'Richard, duke of York', p. 16.

⁶⁷ Jones, 'The Bulkeleyes', p. 4.

⁶⁸ Williams, thesis cited, p. 231.

The pattern of Griffith loyalty in north-west Wales was echoed by the Conways, a prominent Flintshire family. John Conway (1435-86) married Janet, a daughter of Edmund Stanley of Hooton. Their son Hugh was one of Sir William Stanley's most dependable servants and he played a prominent part in supporting Henry Tudor both before and during the battle of Bosworth.⁶⁹ Again, the Conways' descent from the Stanleys was to be the subject of later bardic praise.⁷⁰ Thomas Salisbury, of Llewenni near Denbigh, served as William Stanley's deputy in the county. A prominent burgess and constable of Denbigh from 1466, his sister Constance had married Peter Stanley of Ewloe.⁷¹ The associations of family allegiance augmented the working relationships achieved by Sir William Stanley as chamberlain of Chester and later chief justice of north Wales, with a number of leading Flintshire and Denbighshire families.

IV. Conways



The existence of a family affinity can be seen in the mobilisation of opposition against York as he travelled through north Wales in 1450. If Thomas Stanley could use his position as controller of the king's household to recruit some of the men involved, he could also, and more substantially, draw on the support of many of the leading families of the region, Griffiths, Bulkeleys and Boldes. The existence of such a system of family allegiance prompts questions about the role of the Stanleys more generally in the political turbulence of the late Yorkist and early Tudor period. Edward IV's creation of a new Welsh power-base for his son Edward in the period 1473-74 led to tension between the Woodvilles and the Stanleys. The territorial endowment made for the prince threatened some of the Stanley properties and led to some hard bargaining at court between Thomas Stanley, now steward of Edward IV's household, and the queen's party.⁷² As the end of the reign

⁶⁹ N. Tucker, 'Bodryddan and the families of Conwy, Shipley-Conwy and Rowley-Conwy', *Flintshire Hist. Soc. Journal*, 19 (1961), 68.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

⁷¹ W. A. Evans, 'The Salusberys of Llewenni near Denbigh', *Denbighshire Hist. Soc. Tr.*, IV (1955), 14.

⁷² M. A. Hicks, 'The changing role of the Wydevilles in Yorkist politics to 1483', in *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England*, ed. C. D. Ross (Gloucester, 1979), p. 78. For discussions between the two sides in London, 1473-74, see Westminster Abbey Muniments, 31795, f. 5v.

approached, such differences had become a thing of the past. Both parties had achieved a stable working relationship: the Stanleys were able to use the prince of Wales's council to enhance their position.⁷³ By 1483 the council had recognised the Stanleys' predominance in Cheshire, and both George Stanley (Thomas Stanley's eldest son) and his uncle, Sir William, received preferment. Sir William Stanley's role as steward of the prince's household is of particular interest; the gold Yorkist livery collar of roses and sunbursts found among his possessions at Holt may well have been the insignia of this office.⁷⁴ There was an interchange between his servants and those of the prince. Thomas Bromley of Badington was steward of William's household; his brother John Bromley was one of the principal servants of Edward, prince of Wales. Thus, the family's regional position was, to say the least, equivocal at the time Richard made his bid for the throne. What may have been a decisive factor in their decision to stay loyal, in October 1483, was suspicion of the ambitions of the duke of Buckingham in north Wales. On 16 May 1483 Buckingham was granted the constablerships of all the royal castles in Wales, along with the offices of chamberlain and chief justice, in a remarkable extension of power reminiscent of the authority wielded by William, Lord Herbert in the later 1460s.⁷⁶ There is evidence that this intrusion was resented by a number of the Stanleys' followers. The townspeople of Caernarfon had to be instructed to co-operate with the duke. Also, a letter had to be sent by the royal council to William Bulkeley, 'to stwre and move Hugh his son t'avoide from the possession of the castle of Conway and deliver it to the Duc foresaid'.⁷⁷ Hugh's defiance of the duke was recalled in a later ode by the poet Lewis Môn.⁷⁸ Distrust of Buckingham's grandiose

⁷³ Hicks, 'Wydevilles', pp. 78-79. Some examples of this cooperation can be seen in a writ of Edward, prince of Wales to the sheriff of Chester, ordering John Segemonden to restore salt pans in Brindley and Nantwich to Thomas, Lord Stanley on 20 March 1483 (BL, Add. Ch. 43459), and the appointment of Sir William Stanley to the commission of oyer and terminer for Herefordshire and the Marches (headed by Earl Rivers and Richard Grey) in the same month: *CPR, 1476-85*, p. 345.

⁷⁴ Stanley was steward by February 1483: N. Orme, 'The education of Edward V', *BIHR*, 57 (1984), 124. The inventory of his goods is PRO, E154/2/5. Alternatively, Stanley's collar could have been the insignia of a knight of the body of Edward IV. Sir Richard Roos, another king's knight, is known to have bequeathed a livery collar of gold to his nephew in 1482 (PRO, PCC, Prob. 11/7 f. 34v). I am grateful to Drs. Ian Arthurson and Rosemary Horrox for their help in this matter.

⁷⁵ NLW, MS. 1117E.

⁷⁶ The significance of the grant is discussed in Griffiths, 'Wales and the Marches', p. 162. It effectively combined the personal ascendancy that had been enjoyed by Herbert with the judicial and administrative authority that had lately been held by the prince of Wales's council. For the power enjoyed by Herbert in south and north Wales, see C. D. Ross, *Edward IV* (1974), pp. 76-77.

⁷⁷ H. T. Evans, *Wales and the Wars of the Roses* (Cambridge, 1915), pp. 203-4; Jones, 'The Bulkeleys', p. 5.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

ambitions may well have been more crucial than any positive loyalty to the new king in moving the Stanleys to decline to support the duke's October rebellion.⁷⁹

In August 1485 the Stanley connection was effectively deployed before, during and after Bosworth, as families which had opposed Richard, duke of York's 'sodeyn comying' in 1450 now, thirty-five years later, aided Henry Tudor.⁸⁰ Their support did not end at the battle itself. Tudor Aled recalled how Sir William Stanley's deputy, Thomas Salisbury, gained the king's favour by hunting down the Yorkists who had fled into the Welsh mountains and by betraying their adherents.⁸¹ The Stanleys' strong Cheshire connections were also marshalled against Richard. Their close relations, the Savages, played a prominent part in this opposition, whilst the men of Chester were specifically rewarded by Henry VII for assistance given to him up to and including Bosworth, lending substance to Richard's angry threats (recorded in the *Ballad of Bosworth Field*) to turn all the land from Liverpool to the Wirral into a deerpark.⁸² In Staffordshire the support of the Stanleys of Elford was drawn upon: according to the *Song of Lady Bessy*, Humphrey Stanley was one of the knights dispatched by Lord Stanley to Henry Tudor before the battle.⁸³ These examples serve as a reminder of the concerted family strategy that underpinned William Stanley's own gallant role on the battlefield. This strategy could not be more strongly emphasised than in the wording of Henry's creation of Thomas Stanley, earl of Derby, for the 'great

⁷⁹ The Stanleys were likely to have remembered the retaining carried out in north Wales and Cheshire by Buckingham's father in the 1440s: T. B. Pugh, *The Marcher Lordships of South Wales, 1416-1536* (Cardiff, 1963), p. 159. Buckingham's own efforts to enhance his status in areas of Stanley interest may well have caused tension. The ruins of his fine manor house at Macclesfield where, according to local tradition, he held 'princely residence' towards the end of the reign of Edward IV could still be seen in the seventeenth century: D. King, *The Vale-Royall of England* (1656), p. 86. Buckingham's properties in Macclesfield and Nantwich, and his lordship of Hope in north Wales were regranted to Thomas, Lord Stanley after the failure of the 1483 rebellion (*CPR, 1476-85*, p. 476).

⁸⁰ Griffiths, 'Richard, duke of York', pp. 16-17.

⁸¹ Evans, 'The Salusberys of Llewenni', p. 14.

⁸² *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript*, III, ed. J. W. Hales and F. J. Furnivall (1868), p. 243. For a reward to men of Chester, see *Materials*, I, 9.

⁸³ The evidence for Humphrey Stanley participating in the battle is given in Griffiths and Thomas, *The Making of the Tudor Dynasty*, p. 154, citing 'The Song of Lady Bessey'. After the battle he was made sheriff of Staffordshire and given substantial rewards in the county (*Materials*, I, 11, 37, 60, 95). The Stanley literary tradition indicates close family co-operation: Thomas, Lord Stanley stayed at Elford before the battle and sent Humphrey Stanley to reinforce Henry Tudor. Later, in 1494, Thomas's men were to assist Humphrey in his violent local feud with the Chetwynds of Alspath, which culminated in the murder of William Chetwynd. Their quarrel, over property near Coventry, stretched back into the Yorkist period: William Salt Library, Stafford, H. M. Chetwynd Collection, Bundle 4 (Stanley/Chetwynd obligations, 1484); and for the murder, see PRO, KB9/402/7. I owe these references to Dr. Christine Carpenter, who kindly made available to me her unpublished research on the Staffordshire/Warwickshire branches of the Stanley family.

armed support recently accorded us in battle, both by himself and all his kinsmen, not without great hazard to life and position'.⁸⁴

It is always tempting to be held by the lure of a charismatic and brave individual. Contemporaries were struck by the qualities of Sir William Stanley as much as by the great affinity which he commanded in the Bosworth campaign, the 'many myghty landed men of his Retynue'.⁸⁵ These are themes of the *Song of Lady Bessy*, which portrays William very much as a kingmaker. There are strong indications that the *Song of Lady Bessy* is an important source, drawing on an independent family tradition. But its claim for William must be tested with caution and checked against other evidence. Care must also be taken over the composition of his retinue. The hart's head, an heraldic emblem often associated with Sir William's own affinity, was in fact a Stanley badge, borne by many branches of the family, including the Stanleys of Hooton and Elford, whose followers may well have swelled William's force. New material which has come to light has placed emphasis on the covering march mounted by Thomas, Lord Stanley, and particularly on the possibility that he may have dispersed and defeated royal levies in Leicestershire and Warwickshire two days before the battle.⁸⁶

The conspicuous success of the Stanleys in the Tudor period can be traced to the watershed of Henry VII's patronage.⁸⁷ The contrast with Sir William's own fortunes could not be greater. He himself attained and executed for treason in 1495, his son died in relative poverty, thus ending the male line of this junior branch of the family.⁸⁸ William's motives for engaging in Yorkist conspiracy must remain mysterious. Two factors deserve emphasis. The first is the possibility of Sir William's dissatisfaction at a failure to secure major landed advancement or title. Polydore Vergil

⁸⁴ *Materials*, I, 241.

⁸⁵ *The Great Chronicle of London*, ed. A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley (1938), p. 258, comments also on 'harneys sufficient for a grete hoost' at the castle of Holt. For the view that the battle of Bosworth was decided by Sir William Stanley's men from north Wales, see A. H. Williams, *The Early History of Denbighshire* (1950), pp. 51-52.

⁸⁶ Bennett, *Bosworth*, p. 95. Sir William Stanley had particularly close links with the Brereton family. Urian Brereton was constable of his castle at Chirk, and held the rhaglawship of Merioneth from Stanley (NLW, Chirk MS. 14007F; *RP*, VI, 353). For William's connections with Malpas, including his lease of the parish church, see CRO, DCH/C/391, 429, 949. If, as seems likely, the *Song of Lady Bessy* was composed by a member of the Brereton family some time after Sir William's execution, another factor is of considerable interest. William's granddaughter Jane, by the early sixteenth-century the only surviving member of his line, was to marry a Brereton (*DNB*, LIV, 82), making the family custodians of any surviving oral tradition about his life.

⁸⁷ B. Coward, *The Stanleys, Lords Stanley and Earls of Derby, 1385-1672: the origins, wealth and power of a landowning family* (Manchester, 1983), pp. 13-15.

⁸⁸ Stanley's widow, Elizabeth Hopton, was dead by 1498 (*CFR*, 1485-1509, pp. 259, 269). His son William lived out the remainder of his life as a minor country gentleman: G. R. Elton, *England under the Tudors* (1955), p. 48.

commented tellingly that William was 'more mindful of the favours he had given than of those he had received'.⁸⁹ Of particular interest is the chronicler Holinshed's report of Stanley's disappointment at not receiving the earldom of Chester, which was in abeyance between the death of Richard III's son Edward in 1484 and the creation of Henry VII's own son Arthur late in 1489. William Stanley's use of the badge of the earldom of Chester in his own heraldic device early in the Tudor period is significant here, and suggests anticipation of such a grant.⁹⁰ The second is the residual loyalty that Stanley would have felt towards a genuine son of Edward IV, stemming from his own position as steward of the prince of Wales's household in the early 1480s.⁹¹ For the conspirators, William Stanley's position as king's chamberlain made his co-operation vital in any major attempt to infiltrate Henry VII's household.⁹² But what is clear is that he acted without the support either of his own family or of those who had served him locally in north Wales and Cheshire.⁹³ Any tension that existed between Henry VII and the rest of the Stanleys at the time of William's execution was dispelled soon afterwards by their loyalty in the further crises engendered by Perkin Warbeck.⁹⁴

There is a real element of fascination in Sir William Stanley's role as arbiter of Richard III's fate. Hence the interpretation of an apparently casual

⁸⁹ *The Anglica Historica of Polydore Vergil*, ed. D. Hay (Camden Soc., third series, 75, 1950), p. 77.

⁹⁰ R. Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, ed. H. Ellis (1807-8), III, 509. The earldom of Chester had lapsed to the crown on the death of Richard III's son Edward on 9 April 1484: it was revived for Henry VII's son Arthur on 29 November 1489 (*CP*, III, 175). The armorial devices of Stanley at Holywell, including the wolf's head of the earls of Chester, have been discussed above.

⁹¹ Stanley's comment, that if Perkin Warbeck were truly a son of Edward IV he could never take up arms against him, is reported in *Polydore Vergil*, p. 75. On his involvement with Warbeck, see W. A. Archbold, 'Sir William Stanley and Perkin Warbeck', *EHR*, 14 (1899), 530-31. For his execution, there is an account in *The Great Chronicle*, p. 258; Henry VII's contributions towards his funeral are recorded in BL, Add. MS. 7099, ff. 23-24, 54.

⁹² Ex. inf. Dr. Ian Arthurson, who has discussed his work on Yorkist conspiracies in the reign of Henry VII with me. For the plausible suggestion that the household reforms of 1495 leading to the creation of a privy chamber were prompted by William Stanley's treason, see D. Starkey, *Henry VIII* (1985), p. 25.

⁹³ William Stanley's bastard son Thomas was placed in captivity in 1495; he was not released until the beginning of Henry VIII's reign. He subsequently went abroad and joined the last major Yorkist conspirator, Richard de la Pole: I. Arthurson, 'A question of loyalty', *The Ricardian* VII, 97 (1987), 405. Rowland Bulkeley seems to have been briefly under suspicion, but his subsequent career in Anglesey was not affected (Jones, 'Bulkeleys', p. 7); whilst the Warburtons, Griffiths and Salisburys continued to prosper in royal service.

⁹⁴ The trial of Sir William placed Thomas Stanley, as king's constable, in an extremely difficult position, and credence must be given to the family tradition that he received Henry VII's permission to retire to his estates: J. Seacome, *A Genealogical or Historical Account of the Ancient and Honourable House of Stanley* (1741), p. 41. If so, Henry VII's progress through Lancashire later the same year, and the lavish celebrations at Lathom and Knowsley, were a deliberate display of the king's trust in the Stanleys, just as was his visit to Hawarden castle: *DNB*, LIV, 78; H. Taylor, *Historical Notices of Flint* (1883), p. 102.

reference in a letter from Stanley to Piers Warburton, whereby he asks to be excused a hunting party because he is 'so besy with Old Dyk', as some sinister aside concerning the unfortunate king.⁹⁵ It is time that the effectiveness of a concerted family strategy was given its credit. Broader family unity was by no means a common phenomenon in fifteenth-century society. As Professor Lander has commented, 'family relationships . . . had become too complicated and tangled to be cohesive'.⁹⁶ Even when the family did act together it was often only a temporary event. As Dr Hicks has shown in his study of the Hungerfords, 'consciousness of a shared ancestry and lineage was a source of solidarity in times of crisis At other times they were divided into separate nuclear families.'⁹⁷ Yet, clearly the Stanleys did enjoy a sense of cohesion above the ordinary and whatever the partisan element, this is an important theme that emerges from the ballad tradition, with its emphasis on kinship. This broader unity was perceived by contemporaries. Isabel Stanley, prioress of St Mary's, Derby, exploited her kinship in a dispute with the abbot of Burton, claiming 'I am a gentilwoman comen of the grettest of Lancashire and Chesire, and that shall they knowe right well'.⁹⁸ It is this element that places the career of Sir William Stanley of Holt in its proper context. Welsh chronicle tradition recalls how Sir William was granted the spoils of the battlefield, yet no trace of them is to be found in the careful inventories of his property compiled at Holt and Ridley.⁹⁹ The picture at one of the chief family residences, Knowsley, is rather different. A seventeenth-century inventory records that there was displayed there a suite of hangings, 'taken in Richard the thirdes tent in Bosworth field'.¹⁰⁰ It was, indeed, a family triumph.

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⁹⁵ JRL, Arley Ch. 30/1. The suggestion was first made in W. Beaumont, *A Calendar of Ancient Family Charters preserved at Arley Hall, Cheshire* (1866), p. xxi.

⁹⁶ J. R. Lander, 'Family, "friends" and politics in fifteenth-century England', in *Kings and Nobles in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. R. A. Griffiths and J. Sherborne (Gloucester, 1986), p. 37. A remarkable example of distrust of the broader family is to be found in the instructions of Thomas Ince to his feoffees in 1449; if he is 'by mischeve deyde or slayn by any forcast or purpose of any of his cosyns', they are to prevent them taking possession of his lands (Wigan Record Office, Anderton Deeds, 23/44).

⁹⁷ M. A. Hicks, 'Piety and lineage in the Wars of the Roses: the Hungerford experience', *Kings and Nobles*, p. 104.

⁹⁸ D. A. L. Morgan, 'The individual style of the English gentleman', in *The Lesser Nobility and Gentry of Later Medieval Europe*, ed. M. C. E. Jones (Gloucester, 1986), p. 24.

⁹⁹ PRO, E154/2/5, though ready cash and plate totalled over £8,000: the vast amount of coin and jewels found at Holt was commented on in *The Great Chronicle*, p. 258.

¹⁰⁰ The inventory is cited in O. Millar, 'Strafford and Van Dyck', in *For Veronica Wedgwood These: Studies in Seventeenth Century History*, ed. R. Ollard and P. Tudor-Craig (1986), p. 123. Pamela Tudor-Craig kindly drew my attention to this reference.