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THE STAFFORDSHIRE POLITICAL COMMUNITY 1440-1500

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VOLUME I

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of Keele for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 1981.

ABSTRACT

The general aim of this thesis is to produce a portrait of Staffordshire society during the Wars of the Roses. The chapters illustrate the many roles played by the local gentry and nobility- county administrator, soldier, estate holder and/or officer, litigant, retainer and kinsman- and how these were interrelated. The second chapter carries the burden of the narrative besides being primarily about the major offices of county government and the ways in which these might be exploited by appointees (and, where appropriate, by their patrons). The other chapters, not chronologically structured, concentrate on specialised offices (e.g. chapter III on the Church and chapter IV on forests) and social relationships in such spheres as crime, service and marriage. The thesis' overall structure and content have been largely determined by the nature of the surviving evidence.

Between 1440 and 1500 the 'rule' of Staffordshire passed through a number of hands, with each change-over illustrating a different 'model' of magnate influence in local affairs. In the 1440s and 1450s the Staffords dominated through control of the quarter of the county that was royal land and as the leading land holding family with an affinity built up over generations. Throughout the Yorkist era preeminence lay with lords new to Staffordshire, who, though powerful at court, struggled to win local support and realise this at the muster. By Henry VII's reign the indigenous lay nobility, like its clerical counterpart, had lost most of its political muscle. Power was increasingly drawn into the hands of the leading gentry, especially those appointed to and diligent in local offices. Perquisites went to local men rather than out-of-county favoured courtiers, though forest sinecures were occasionally an exception. Similarly, crime and marriage were local affairs, as befitted a quiet and impoverished county far from the madding crowd.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These are so numerous that listing them is a task more daunting than writing the thesis itself; my apologies go immediately to anyone who helped me and whom I have omitted from this page. I am grateful to the D.E.S. for funding this research in a time of such financial stringency and to the staffs of various record offices (particularly those at Stafford) and at the university library at Keele for their assistance. The history department at Keele, lecturers and secretaries, have also been of great assistance at various times, especially the medievalists Dr. Christopher Harrison and Dr. Robin Studd. Thanks are also due to Phillip Staves who facilitated my visit to the battlefield at Blore Heath, and to my fellow resident tutor, James Clarke, who is responsible for innumerable cups of tea and coffee, several potential ulcers and at least one subordinate clause in the middle of chapter two. James has also lent his talent for spelling correctly to me in reading over various portions of my work. I am also grateful to numerous friends whose complete indifference to my research has enabled me to escape from the pressure of work. Finally, as I write this on a nondescript September morning, mention must needs be made of a certain bearded gentleman barely visible in an office window some two hundred yards distant—my supervisor Dr. Colin Richmond, whom I hold in great awe and affection. Over the past few years he has been good enough to share with me his company and knowledge of fifteenth-century England and life in general. His patience, though not boundless, has thus far held up as he has had to turn a knowing eye to my infrequent literary offerings and a deaf ear to many declarations that I was going to give up the research and flee the country. Whether Colin is to be commended or condemned for this, I leave my readers to decide.

John Rowley

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND NOBILITY

The study of a county during the fifteenth century at the level of a doctoral thesis has to be selective. There is so much surviving evidence that more than one work would be needed to cover adequately every aspect of the area's history. This particular thesis, researched as it has been between 1978 and 1981, is part of the wider search among students of the later middle ages for an understanding of local politics and the structure of society at the level of the shire. My aims are to examine such questions as who ran the institutions of local government in Staffordshire? Was there any recognizable structure within the county community? How did the nobility and gentry interrelate? And, above all, who were the major figures of the age? My approach has been throughout a biographical one, largely based upon an extensive card-index system. Such a technique, revealing as it does the rich variety of characters and careers, has obviously affected to some extent the picture I obtained and here pass on of Staffordshire during the period encompassing the Wars of the Roses. It stresses the importance of the individual rather than the forces of economic predestination. It also limits the scope of the study in as much as only those who left behind a record of their doings (mainly written) can properly be included. 'The mere uncounted folk of whose life and death is none report or lamentation', as Kipling put it, regrettably are once more passed over. Yet, since they were not the county governors with whom and with whose actions my thesis is primarily concerned, this need not unduly worry us.

The most common phrase in studies of the social structure of later-medieval England is 'Bastard Feudalism'. It has been both hailed as a vital tool in the maintenance of law and order and denigrated as the fount of crime and the seeming immunity afforded to many contemporary criminals. However, defining bastard feudalism is both difficult and hazardous. Many aspects of it were neither novel, universally applicable nor exclusive to it. It can perhaps best be characterised as an arrangement of relationships exhibiting many of the features of the classic feudal model, but in which money had replaced land as the cohesive medium within society. What that meant in practice will become apparent as this study progresses.

Generalisations and an uncritical selection of evidence have left the fifteenth century (still) with a reputation for violence and magnate manipulation of the legal and governmental processes. As recently as 1976 one historian could write of the royal court, law courts and parliament as being so riddled with magnates and their affinities that the traditional workings of government were strangled 'while liveried retainers, mercenaries without a war, became the sole levers of power.'¹ This has been the received wisdom of the ages and, as such, deserves close scrutiny.

Basic questions need answering about the nature of the relationship between lord and retainer. For example, was this relationship markedly different (the fee apart) from the one between a lord and non-retained, friendly, local gentlemen? How far were retainers placed in office by magnate influence, given that they were usually drawn from the sort of men appointed to those offices anyway because of local

prominence in their own right? To all such questions should be added the words 'in Staffordshire'; for it is dangerous to generalise from county to county in the fifteenth century, let alone from one small area to the entire realm.

Historians of the later middle ages are blessed (if that is the right word) with an abundant quantity, if not diversity, of source material. Surviving written evidence is, naturally, just the remnant of such records as existed at this time and reflects what was then regarded as worth setting down permanently. It is mainly with impersonal land deeds, accounts and legal records that students of this era must deal. A moment's consideration, however, on how misleading and fragmentary a history of our present time would be if all that later historians had to work with were the modern counterparts of these, should induce caution as to the use of and extrapolation from this earlier material. Letters from the fifteenth century are rare and cherished when found, but such a collection as the Paston Letters from East Anglia, largely relating a tale of woe and the evils of maintenance, is not necessarily representative of the situation all over England. After all, not every gentry family was trying to poach an inheritance.

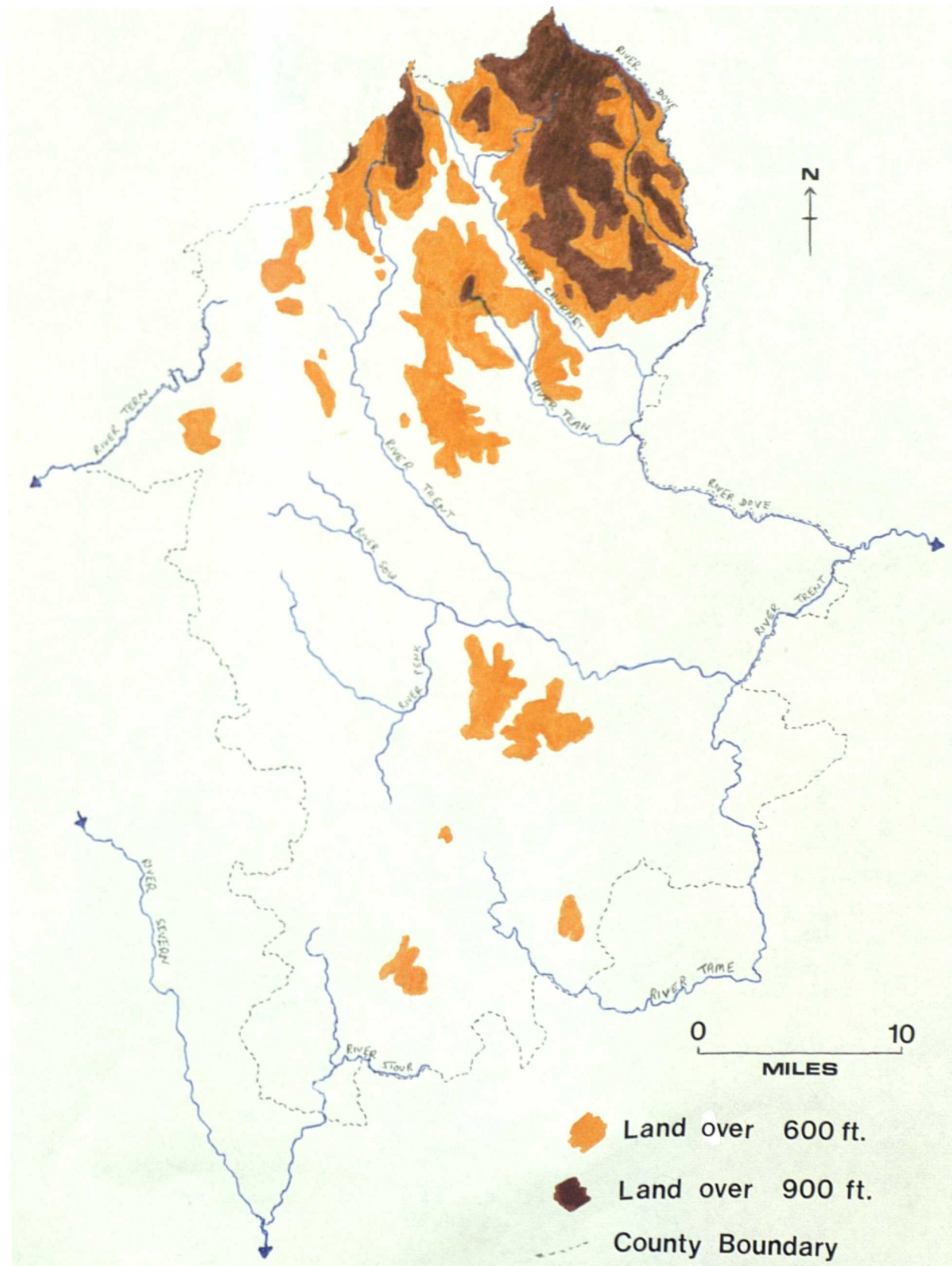
The political history of a region was determined less by vague impersonal forces than by the considered actions and characters of specific individuals, the fortunes of genetics and disease and, above all, the pattern of magnate landholding, which provided the basic canvas upon which all was painted. The ability (or lack of it) of a local nobleman to attract and maintain gentry support was the principal factor affecting the latter's courses of action and freedom of choice over his allegiance. At its simplest,

this meant that military conflict or factional rivalry (the two are not necessarily synonymous) were less likely in an area dominated by one lord or faction than in another area containing alternative sources of patronage, which might necessitate canvassing for gentry support. This is hardly profound, but nevertheless gets often overlooked by those perennially seeking complex solutions for every historical problem. Within the period 1440-1500 only in the first two decades could Staffordshire be said to have been 'under' anyone, and that was Humphrey, duke of Buckingham, the leading local landholder. In the 1460s, 1470s and 1480s, though Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, Walter Blount, Lord Mountjoy, George, duke of Clarence and William, Lord Hastings all exercised considerable influence in the county for a short time, their careers serve only to exemplify how political connections were stronger and more durable if built up over generations rather than months or years, and that political power within an area was the more secure when based upon extensive landholdings therein rather than patronage from without- or, better still, both.

The purpose of this initial chapter is to outline who and where were the nobility of Staffordshire, as a basis for later sections on the gentry and church. However, a few introductory details on the county's geography are needed to set things in motion.

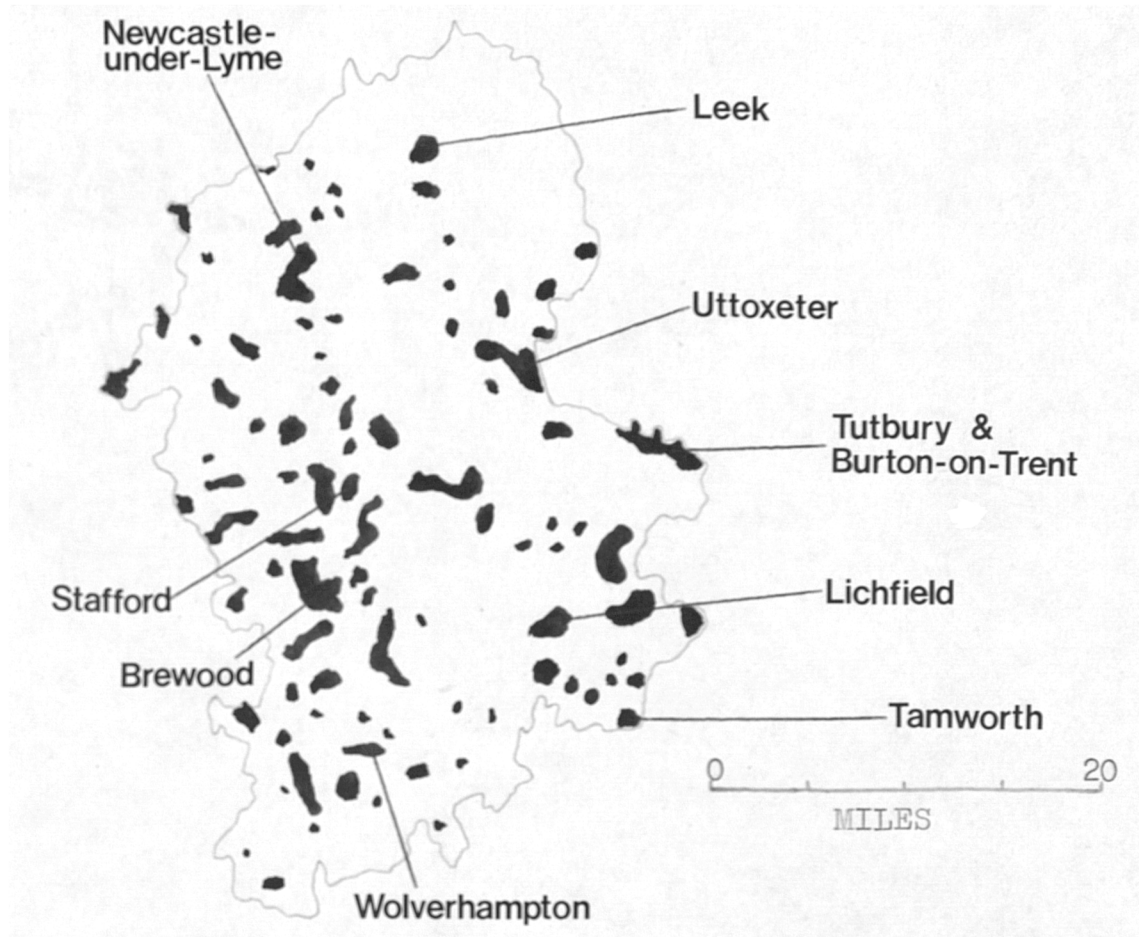
Staffordshire is roughly diamond-shaped, some fifty miles in length and thirty in breadth. It lies, landlocked, in the north Midlands, surrounded by six other counties: Cheshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire. There is no distinctive 'Staffordshire' landscape; what exists is rather an extension of the features of

adjacent counties. The physical layout, as portrayed below, reveals how the north of Staffordshire, which forms part of the Peak District and to a lesser extent the area of Cannock Chase, just south of the river Trent, were the only major patches of high ground. Most of the county consisted of gently undulating countryside, though moor land predominated in the north-east. The population of Staffordshire was



distributed around these areas of high ground. Below is a diagram showing the distribution at the time of the Domesday survey. Judging from references from deeds and criminal records, little had changed by the fifteenth century.

Relative Distribution of Adults
at the Time of the Domesday Survey.*

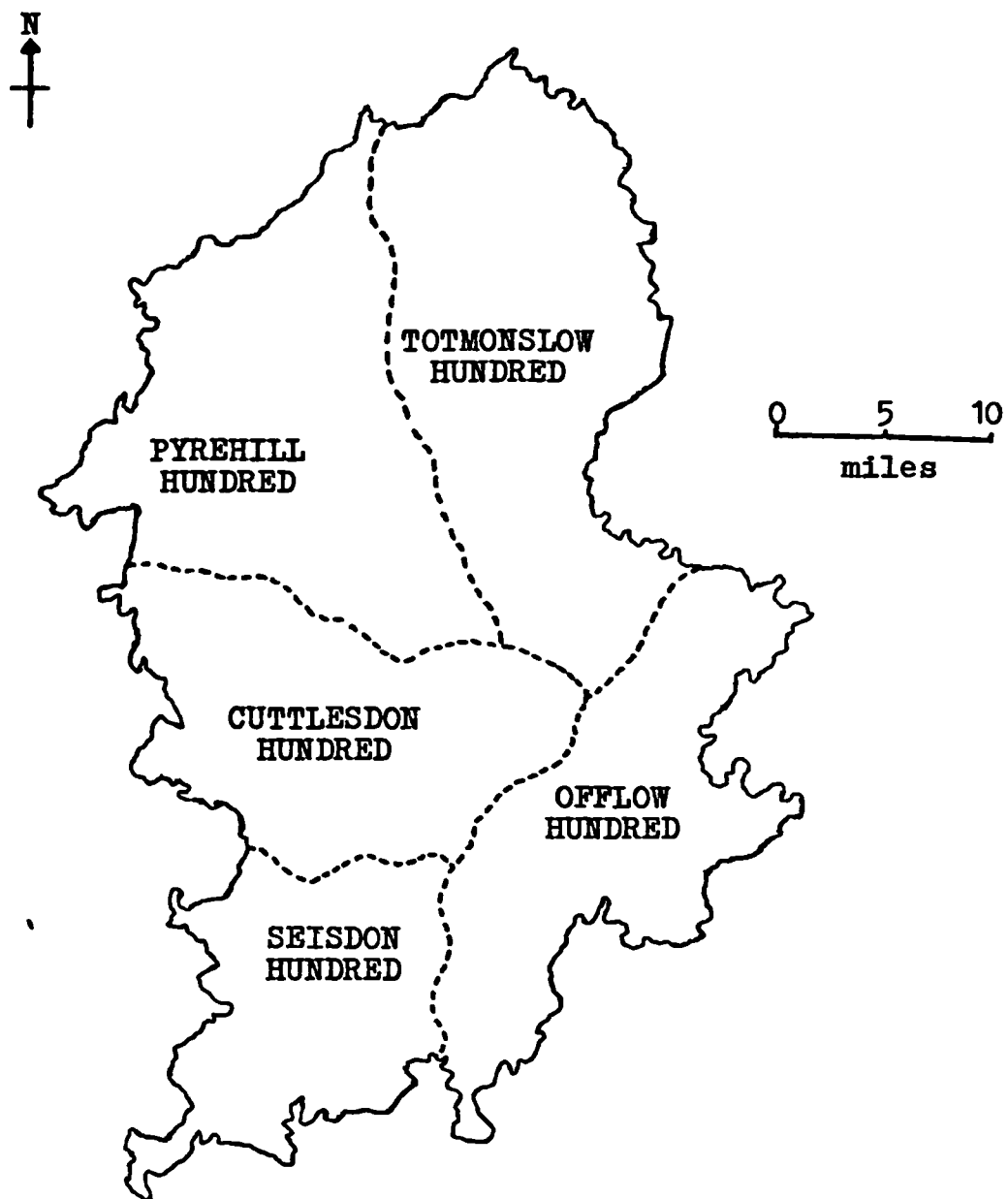


Though the population rose greatly, this distribution pattern was maintained. The main centres were in the south-east around Lichfield and Tamworth, along the River Dove at Uttoxeter, Tutbury and Burton-on-Trent, in the north-west around Newcastle-under-Lyme and in a fertile crescent stretching from Stafford via Brewood to Wolverhampton.

* Taken largely from J. Myers 'Staffordshire' in L.D. Stamp (ed.), The Land of Britain: the Report of the Land Utilisation Survey of Britain, (London, 1937-50), V, 61, p.633.

The county was divided into five hundreds, though these were of no real importance by the fifteenth century, except in as much as they were the unit used for collection of parliamentary subsidies. The Staffordshire hundreds were Pyrehill in the north-west, Totmonslow in the north-east, Cuttlesdon (or Cudleston) in the centre, Seisdon in the south-west and Offlow in the south-east.

THE HUNDREDS OF MEDIEVAL STAFFORDSHIRE



Staffordshire spent an insignificant millenium between its heydays as a centre of Mercian power in Anglo-Saxon times and of economic strength during the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, once its mineral deposits were fully exploited. Though the county had been bisected by the Danelaw line and had two Roman roads (Watling Street and Rykneld Street) passing through it, it had never been more than a place to be traversed on the way north. By the fifteenth century even this role had been somewhat diminished. Royal trips or expeditions now passed through Leicester or Nottingham. Even Henry VI, who spent considerable periods at Coventry, only came to Staffordshire twice- once in early September 1456 and again three years later while in hot pursuit of the Earl of Salisbury after the battle of Blore Heath.

With no internal navigable waterways to facilitate trade and communication and with a soil that was never of more than average fertility, Staffordshire was one of the poorer English counties. Some indication of both its poverty and perhaps its population relative to other counties can be gauged from such indicators as the division of responsibility for raising the parliamentary grant of 1450 to pay for twenty thousand men for national defence.² Staffordshire's share was 173 men, compared to 236 for Warwickshire and 141 for Derbyshire among its neighbours, and 368 and 424 respectively for more prosperous Essex and Gloucestershire. In the 1474 parliamentary grant for troops to undertake a campaign in France, Staffordshire was assessed at £899, compared to £1139 for Warwickshire, £741 for Derbyshire and £795 for Shropshire.³

The nobility of Staffordshire can be divided into three categories: major, minor and 'fringe'. This final category describes those noblemen of whatever status whose

land-holdings in the county were minimal. Some, like the Stanleys in Cheshire and Lancashire or the Talbot Earls of Shrewsbury in Shropshire and north Derbyshire, had considerable influence in the north-west Midlands, but only rarely became a feature of Staffordshire life. The Talbots held only one manor in Staffordshire, that of Alton with its draughty and isolated castle in the Peak District. The Earls of Ormond and Wiltshire, the Butler family in the fifteenth century, held three manors (Clent, Mere and Handsworth) in the extreme south of the county, while the Beauchamp and Neville Earls of Warwick possessed , again in southern Staffordshire, four manors (Pattingham, Drayton Bassett, Perry Barr and Walsall).

Of the indigenous nobility there were three minor and one major families. The former were the Tuchet Lords Audley, the Sutton/Dudley Lords Dudley and the Ferrers/Devereux Lords Ferrers of Chartley.

Between 1440 and 1500 there were three generations of Tuchets who became Lords Audley. Each time son followed father: James I (1398-1459), John (c.1425-90) and James II (1463-97). Their rise in fortune had been accompanied by a progressive absenteeism from their north Midland place of origin. James Tuchet the elder was summoned to parliament from 1420 onwards. Although he was a justice of the peace in Staffordshire, Shropshire and Derbyshire from the 1420s, and although he was appointed to a commission in November 1436 to deal with attacks on the dean and chapter at Lichfield⁴, his career (like his favourite estates) lay away from the Midlands. He served militarily in France and judicially in Herefordshire and south Wales. In that last area he was at various times Chief Justice and Chamberlain.⁵ Had he cultivated closer relations with the local gentry and his tenantry in Staffordshire, he would have had greater success in recruiting

an army to fight the Yorkists in the summer of 1459. As it was, he fell at the battle of Blore Heath with few Staffordshire men alongside him.

His son John was similarly absent from his Cheshire and Staffordshire estates. Through marrying a Dorsetshire widow, Anne Echingham, John added property in that county to his inheritance. He had succeeded in retaining his family's lands in 1461 because, after being captured by the Yorkists at Calais a year earlier, he had switched sides. This move, prompted by an instinct for survival rather than perfidy, proved politically successful. He became one of Edward IV's favourites, though, as Professor Ross has indicated, his reputation for being grasping was exaggerated.⁶ His only rewards were an appointment in May 1461 as steward of the Crown's property in Dorset and a grant six years later of a couple of Surrey manors forfeited by the deceased Earl of Wiltshire.⁷ In the 1470s a few more grants came Audley's way⁸, and he took part in the French campaign of 1475.

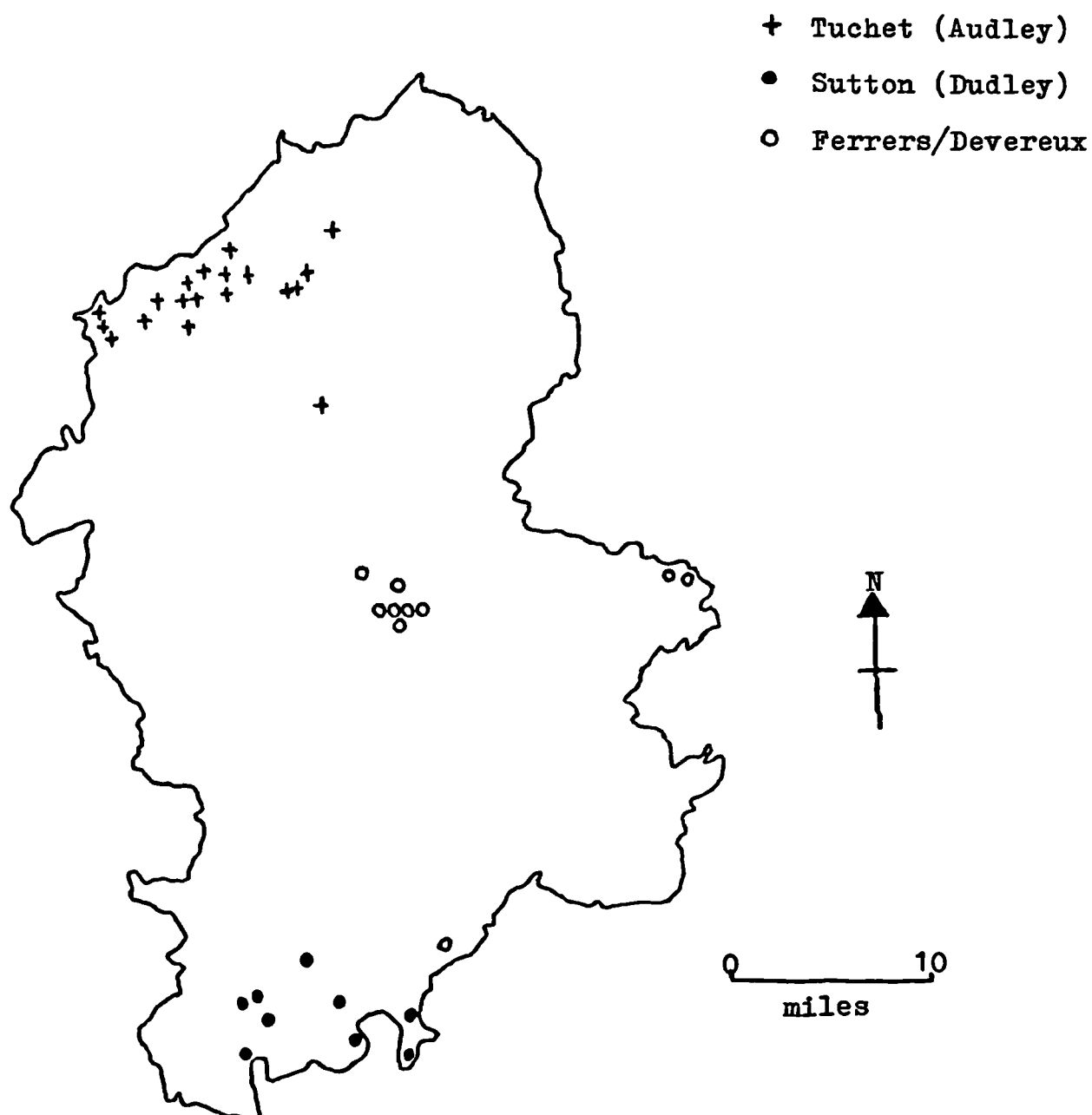
Significantly, such grants as he did obtain had nothing to do with Staffordshire and Cheshire, which is further indication of his lack of interest in the area. Had things been otherwise, Audley would doubtless have been pressed for any rewards coming his way to have been in the north Midlands—after all, there were plenty of opportunities for patronage in Staffordshire with the vast tracts of Crown land and escheated Stafford family inheritance. Audley certainly took no part in the administration of either the Stafford lands, despite the interweaving of these with his own, or the county in general, though like his father he was regularly appointed to county commissions. Thus the Audley influence within Staffordshire and Cheshire was less than it might have been. It was through the local gentry, such as the Egertons of Wrinehill, that the Tuchets' presence was represented and their

property administered. Audley's appointment to the Staffordshire bench was mere courtesy.

The family was split in the Readeption period. Lord John sided with Edward IV, but his brother Humphrey fell at Tewkesbury for the House of Lancaster. John later paid six hundred marks to secure for himself those family lands his brother had held and prevent their being confiscated and dispersed as rewards among loyal Yorkists.⁹ In 1483 he acquiesced in Richard of Gloucester's seizure of the throne, for which he was appointed Treasurer of England in the following year. Yet he was not prepared to defend this new patron on the battlefield and thus found pardon easy to obtain from Henry Tudor on 18 November 1485. He adapted quietly to the Tudor regime, passing his last few years without notable incident.

James, Lord Audley II succeeded his father in autumn 1490. Little is known of him, but like his recent forebears he appears to have taken little interest in his Midland estates. He came to an untimely end when in 1497 'in consequence of some disgust'¹⁰, he joined the Cornish revolt- the only peer so to do. He was captured at Blackheath and executed. Audley's subsequent attainder brought the Tuchet lands to the Crown. In 1503-4 these brought Henry VII £474 clear.¹¹ His property in Staffordshire was concentrated in Pyrehill hundred and in particular around Newcastle-under-Lyme, Madeley and Betley. The family's main residence in this area was at Heighley castle, three miles west of Newcastle, and its property included many of the small villages north and west of Heighley, extending into Cheshire.

At the opposite end of Staffordshire were the Suttons of Dudley. The dominant figure in the family was John Sutton, created Lord Dudley in 1440. Dudley (1400-87) had been head of the family, if at first nominally, from infancy. His estates centred on Dudley and Dudley castle. Other principal manors

ESTATES OF THE MINOR STAFFORDSHIRE NOBILITY

were Himley, King's Swinford, Rowley Regis, Malpas (Cheshire) and Birmingham, where he was feudal overlord. His inheritance also extended into Shropshire and there was land worth £40 a year at Appletree and Aston-in-the-Wall (Northamptonshire). He was without doubt the most gifted Staffordshire nobleman of the century and excelled as justice, soldier, diplomat, administrator and politician. These talents were recognised early. In 1422 he carried the banner at Henry V's funeral and was Lieutenant of Ireland

by the age of twenty-eight.¹² He served on the Staffordshire bench from 1430 until his death fifty-seven years later, missing only one commission- during the Readeption. He spent almost as long as a justice of the peace in Shropshire and Worcestershire.

His exact political position remains something of an enigma. During the 1420s and 1430s he was certainly connected with Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, in whose retinue he served in France. In 1432 Sutton with two others gave recognizances in a thousand marks on behalf of Gloucester and the fledgling Richard, duke of York that the latter might have livery of his lands.¹³

Like Audley, he spent a great deal of time away from Staffordshire, though Lord Dudley (as he became in 1440) did at least sit on the Staffordshire bench to which both had been appointed. His prolonged absences were due to duties at court; to his extensive services at Calais, where he was sometime keeper¹⁴; and to his numerous diplomatic forays, especially in the 1440s. Towards the end of that decade Dudley and York fell out. This was probably due less to any fundamental shift in Dudley's domestic political allegiances than to his association with the diplomacy surrounding the end of English power in France. Now in the prime of life, his role as a competent 'workhorse' brought him great rewards, which, with his association with courtiers such as Suffolk and the Beauforts led to his being not-unfairly identified as one of the leading leeches bleeding the Crown financially white. He was thus a prime target for the reaction against the court faction in the early 1450s. Indeed in 1451 he was even kidnapped for a short time by York and held at Ludlow castle.¹⁵ He was also

removed from the King's council. The rift between York and Dudley was permanent. Dudley fought against York at the battle of Saint Albans in May 1455 and against his associate the Earl of Salisbury at Blore Heath four years later.

Many of the grants made to Dudley, unlike those to the Tuchets, concerned Staffordshire and Shropshire, so boosting his power in the area around his patrimony. In 1446 he was even granted the Hundred of Seisdon (in effect, south Staffordshire), though this was actually only a grant of certain payments made to the Crown for various petty rights and courts.¹⁶ In 1442 he was awarded £480 for his 'bons et agreables services',¹⁷ and quickly followed that up by securing two lucrative wardships- those of Humphrey Blount of Kinlet and William Frebody. Blount was presumably backed by Dudley when he was appointed escheator of Staffordshire in 1445 and sheriff a year later. In 1443 Dudley was granted the lease of Shrawardine in Shropshire, and in 1444 property in Powys, confiscated from Sir Griffin Vaughan, came his way too.¹⁸ Most of these grants were resumed in 1450, though even so he still retained annuities from the Crown worth £216/13s/4d.¹⁹

There is insufficient space here to record all the grants accruing to Dudley, though most served to increase his family's position in Staffordshire. For instance, he worked hard to collect offices in Kinver forest, some of which he managed to pass on to his heirs (see Chapter III).

During the crisis of 1459-61 Dudley switched sides. Though he had briefly been a Yorkist captive after Blore Heath, this switch came as a surprise, since he had profited greatly from the Lancastrian distribution of forfeited rebel lands.²⁰ It would seem therefore that he had much to lose by deserting the royal colours and little to gain. It is difficult

to believe that his defection stemmed from a desire to see the realm governed by the Yorkists because of their selflessness or political incorruptibility. He knew them too well to fall for their propaganda. As Professor Lander has put it:

'High moral standards were sticks with which to beat opponents rather than measuring rods for their own personal conduct. In 1461 the reputation of the Yorkist inner group, both the quick and the dead, surrounding an inexperienced king of nineteen, could have given little confidence in better government.'²¹

The Suttons (who were gradually adopting 'Dudley' as their surname) took over York's Welsh lordship of Montgomery in early February 1460, with Dudley himself as steward and his sons Edmund and Oliver as constable and receiver.²²

In April or May of that year Dudley (wrongly called William in the Patent Rolls) was appointed to a commission in Staffordshire to assemble and lead troops against the Yorkists whenever they should land in England; but by November he was ready to sail to Calais in the retinue of Richard, earl of Warwick.²³

Dudley's defection probably followed in the wake of the Lancastrian defeat at Northampton on 10 July, when Humphrey, duke of Buckingham and John, earl of Shrewsbury were killed. Maybe Dudley's political acumen told him that the tide had turned in the Yorkists' favour; maybe he realised that in the political vacuum the deaths of Buckingham and Shrewsbury brought to the north Midlands his family's interests would be best served by an aggrandisement impossible from within the ranks of the Lancastrian partisans. Self-interest, perhaps tinged with disillusion with the remaining leadership of the court faction and coupled to enticing overtures from his former friend York, persuaded him to throw in his lot with the disaffected faction of

the nobility- not disaffection itself.

This decision to support York proved to be a fortuitous one; he backed the right house. The stream of patronage, which had flowed so freely from one king, continued unabated under the next. All of Dudley's debts to the deposed Henry VI were pardoned; in 1464 he received one hundred marks as expenses; the following year an annuity of £100 came to him; and in 1466 he obtained the reversion of the manor of Bordesley (Worcestershire).²⁴ The Yorkists' return for all this patronage was the same general administrative service as he had given Henry VI. Although Dudley was a councillor for both Henry VI and Edward IV, he held no major office under the latter and had only been Treasurer of the Household from April 1453 to June 1455 under the former. Loyalty and reliability were how he repaid this patronage.

Dudley lost a son at the battle of Edgecote in 1469, and in 1471 he was prominent in the repulsion of the forces of the Bastard of Fauconberg from London, being Constable of the Tower at the time. He later became chamberlain to the Queen, though kept his distance from the Wydeville faction. By the time of the accession of Richard III, although well into his eighties, Dudley was still being fêted by the monarch of the day. He had outlived his eldest son Edmund (c.1430-83) and most of the hotheads of three generations. So it is hardly surprising that he would have nothing to do with Henry, duke of Buckingham's ill-considered revolt in 1483. In fact he helped to suppress it and was rewarded with Buckingham's Staffordshire manors of Darlaston, Bentley, Tittensor, Hartwell and Packington, as well as other property at Bridgenorth, Rugby and Newton-in-the -Willows, Kinver and Stourton. These last two manors

must have been particularly gratefully received as they greatly strengthened his family's power in southern Staffordshire. Richard III also granted him annuities of £160.²⁵ In July 1484 he was also allowed to lease two more south Staffordshire manors, Pattingham and Walsall, which had in the previous few decades passed through the hands of Warwick and Clarence, and of which Dudley and his late son Edmund had been stewards for the Crown since 1478.²⁶

How much Dudley envisaged some or all of this patronage would come his way should he remain loyal to the murderer of the children of his old patron Edward IV will never be known. It seems that he kept his feelings to himself, confident that his family's interests were best served by taking advantage of periods of Stafford weakness. Although less of a trimmer than the Stanleys, Dudley had learned well how to judge when it was the right time to declare an allegiance and when it was better quietly to play safe. That was how he survived, prospered and built up his family's power in the much-contested area of south Staffordshire. He lived long enough to be honoured by the first of the Tudor kings with an annuity of £100²⁷, and was wealthy enough to buy two north Worcestershire manors, Northfield and Weoley, for a thousand marks from that new king²⁸, before death finally claimed him, the last of an era on the last day of September 1487.

With the Tuchets in the north-west and the Suttons/Dudleys in the south of Staffordshire, it would be gratifying to find the other family in the trio of minor nobility based somewhere near the centre of the county; and fate, with an eye to symmetry, has neatly obliged.

The Barons Ferrers of Chartley held manors grouped around Chartley to the east of Stafford and at Great Barr in the south of Staffordshire. However, their importance in this county was slight compared to that in Warwickshire where with the Beauchamp Earls of Warwick and Ralph, Lord Sudeley they struggled against the power of the Staffords.²⁹ The short-lived marriage between the widow of Edmund, Lord Ferrers (1389-1435) and Philip Chetwynd, a retainer of Humphrey, earl of Stafford, in the late 1430s eased matters. However after their deaths Edmund's son William (1412-50) reformed his links with the Beauchamps, though not without losing some of his affinity to the Staffords (as will be shown in the next chapter). Like the Dudleys, the Ferrers family shed no tears whenever Stafford's wings were clipped, though neither was in much of a position to engage in such a practice in Staffordshire. John, Lord Dudley did once serve as a feoffee for Lord William in January 1445³⁰, though there were also several Stafford supporters included on that deed. I can find no evidence that Ferrers and Dudley were allies of any sort.

After William's sudden and early death in 1450 his widow, Elizabeth Bealknap, took his important Warwickshire estates as her dower, while those in Staffordshire were left to their daughter and heiress, Anne, whose Herefordshire husband, Walter Devereux took no interest in the politics of the north Midlands. When, in February 1455, Walter and Anne gave an undertaking not to disturb any of her mother's tenants (Elizabeth seems to have been thinking about entering a nunnery), significantly none of the witnesses to the deed was from Staffordshire.³¹ Anne's inheritance (dower excluded) was held by her father's friend Ralph, Lord Sudeley until she reached the age of fourteen in 1453.³²

Walter's career passed almost unconnected with Staffordshire, so little needs to be written here about him. His only use for the Ferrers estates in this county was as an additional source of income. His family had been among the closest supporters of Richard, duke of York, and he eventually fell at Bosworth in 1485 fighting for the last of York's sons, Richard III. In this venture he seems to have been unsupported by his Staffordshire tenantry, which is not surprising given the lack of attention he had previously paid to them. His son and heir John (1463-1501) was with him at Bosworth, though unlike Walter he was not attainted for choosing the losing side. John was speedily forgiven and entered his inheritance on 4 March 1486. John at least did take some interest in his Staffordshire lands, as we have documents concerning them, which we do not have for his father.³³ In 1493 the estates in Staffordshire plus Castle Bromwich and Bulbrook (Northamptonshire) were settled upon him and his wife jointly, though she died soon afterwards.³⁴

The contrast between two counties in the fifteenth century is well illustrated and the dangers in generalisation highlighted by the differing levels of political participation therein by the minor nobility of Staffordshire and Warwickshire. In the latter county noblemen were consumed by an obsession with political intrigue and the manipulation of the law to bolster partisan aspirations. Factions, although never stable, were an ever-present feature of local politics, with various combinations of noblemen emerging regularly to confront one another- not so in Staffordshire. There one's attention is drawn to the paucity of the contribution to county life and politics of such minor noble families, with two of them apparently unconcerned at losing by default any

significant place. Only Dudley realised that, flirtations with the court or national politics notwithstanding, it profited a man nothing unless his actions served to buttress and extend his local powerbase. That Humphrey, duke of Buckingham and earl of Stafford was so powerful and went largely unchallenged between 1440 and 1460 owed much to his territorial dominance and wealth, but it was also the result of others opting out of county politics. Buckingham can hardly be said to have 'conquered' his political opponents in Staffordshire as there was effectively no-one there to be fought. What little Richard Neville, earl of Warwick could do in the 1450s was ultimately doomed to failure because he lacked an insufficiently wide territorial powerbase within Staffordshire; while such men as Dudley and Ferrers/Devereux who did possess the necessary estates seriously to challenge the Staffords were disinclined to join forces there with the Earl.

Dr. Rawcliffe has already produced a detailed analysis of the Stafford family, their estates and administrative system³⁵, so all that is required here to set the scene is a thumbnail sketch of the careers of the three Dukes of Buckingham.

Most of the family's Staffordshire property had been theirs since the Conquest. Earl Humphrey had added to this in the 1430s by buying out neighbours' estates at Darlaston and Church Eaton for five hundred marks.³⁶ However, it was through the acquisition of parts of the Corbet and Clare inheritances in the middle of the fourteenth century that the Staffords attained national prominence. The first of these consisted of the lordship of Caurs in Shropshire, while the second provided them with extensive estates in

several regions of the country, particularly the Welsh marches and the Home Counties. As was to be the general pattern of the county's aristocracy (see the final chapter), the Staffords' rise was due to service and marriage rather than grant or purchase of land.³⁷ By the fifteenth century the Staffords were the most powerful family within the county whose name they proudly bore- especially after the seizure of the throne by Henry, earl of Lancaster in 1399 had resulted in his and his heirs being less able to supervise closely their extensive estates in the east of the county (i.e. the Honour of Tutbury).

Humphrey Stafford (1402-60) was the sixth Earl of Stafford, coming into the title at the age of one after the death of his father at the battle of Shrewsbury. By 1438, having secured all his inheritance (including his mother's dower estates), he had learned the rules of and was busily applying himself to that initial sport of kings- local politics, a pastime in which he was, despite sporadic successes, never to attain any notable proficiency. The major battleground was northern Warwickshire, where he and the Beauchamp Earls of Warwick vied for supremacy. In this he was assisted by the acquisition of Maxstoke castle (about ten miles east of Birmingham and eight south of Tamworth), which was a more popular residence with him than Stafford itself, and Atherstone on the Leicestershire border.³⁸ Such details are important, for the political histories of these counties at this time centred around the same matters.

The Stafford domination of Staffordshire continued almost uncontested until the 1450s, when Richard Neville's offers of patronage and support to selected south Staffordshire gentlemen and the powerful Blount family of Derbyshire

created a bastion of anti-Stafford feeling. To these can be added the powerful Harcourt family (originally from Oxfordshire) of Ranton and Ellenhall-by-Eccleshall, excluded from power within Staffordshire as former members of the Ferrers affinity and further alienated by Buckingham supporting the Staffords of Grafton in the feud between them and the Harcourts. Buckingham was fortunate that Warwick was young and not always sufficiently competent to take full advantage of the situation. Buckingham fell at the battle of Northampton on 10 July 1460, his position weaker than it had been in Staffordshire for a generation. This left the county's stage to his rivals once the national situation had been settled.

Duke Humphrey's eldest son, the Lord Humphrey, having died in 1458, the succession passed to the Lord's infant son, Henry.³⁹ Thus, for the second time in the century the Staffords were faced with a lengthy minority. The widowed Duchess Anne's dower estates only included Packington from Staffordshire⁴⁰, but the family leased the rest of their property in the county from the King⁴¹, by whom the wardship and marriage of the young Duke were bought.⁴² Duke Henry was kept in the household of Edward IV's queen, Elizabeth Wydeville, and much to his disgust (for he considered the match to be disparaging) was married to her younger sister Catherine.⁴³

The Stafford family property in Staffordshire and in the lordship of Caurs brought in about £320 clear per year. Within Staffordshire there were major estates in the north around Newcastle-under-Lyme (principally at Madeley, Whitmore, Barlaston, Tittensor, Norton, Burslem and Penkhull), at Stafford and to the south-west (such as Blymhill, Church

Eaton, Dunston, Bradley) and other isolated estates like Drayton Bassett on the Warwickshire border. Although the family was preeminent among the nobility of the county, there were large areas in which they held little or no land, in particular in the Peak District and along the Derbyshire border.

From fairly soon after the first Duke's death and especially once the Yorkist claim to the throne had been successfully prosecuted, the remaining Staffords set about readjusting themselves politically. Duke Humphrey had two younger sons, Sir John and Sir Henry Stafford. These brothers were pardoned on 25 June 1461 and two days later at Edward IV's coronation John was created a Knight of the Bath. He was to serve Edward faithfully for the rest of his life, fighting alongside the Nevilles at Hexham in 1464 and opposing them in the crisis of 1469-71, for which service he was made Earl of Wiltshire in February 1470. Sir Henry was not so prominent. He had served with his father on two military commissions in 1459 and 1460 against the Yorkists⁴⁴, but in the 1460s was content to settle down inconspicuously with his bride Margaret, countess of Richmond, mother of the future Henry VII.

The Duchess Anne felt it was prudent to buy influential friends among the victors. William, Lord Hastings was retained at the sizeable annuity of twenty marks in November 1461.⁴⁵ He was to prove a good friend and a valuable ally. By 1472 he was her steward of Rutland (he may well have been so appointed much earlier) and was one of her executors eight years later. In 1467 she married Sir Walter Blount, Lord Mountjoy, one of her former husband's antagonists; but there is no evidence that the match

was forced upon her by the King. By 1467 Edward needed as many friends as possible and was hardly going to antagonise the Staffords, who by this time were staunch supporters of his. It was, however, a fortuitous match for Blount, who headed one of the leading gentry families in the north Midlands. Blount too was a firm supporter of the King, and the match increased the influence of both families and of the Crown in the area.

By the time of the Readeption crisis the Stafford/Blount alliance was set against the return of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou, especially as it appeared that Warwick's kingmaking activities, if successful, would spell trouble for them and a return to prominence both nationally and in the north Midlands of the Staffords' arch-rival. Furthermore, Edward IV's grant to Mountjoy and Duchess Anne of the south Wales estates of the Stafford family which had been in the keeping of Warwick since 1460 gave them an additional incentive to oppose the return of the Earl and his new Lancastrian allies. Sir Henry and Sir John Stafford served on Edward IV's commissions of array in Staffordshire on 29 October 1469 and 18 April 1471, while Sir John and Mountjoy were licensed to pardon rebels in April 1470.

There were Lancastrian attempts to win over the Staffords and Mountjoy. Anne and Mountjoy were pardoned on 26 December 1470 and confirmed in the Stafford family estates⁴⁶, while the adolescent Duke Henry was granted some confiscated North Country lands of the Tudors.⁴⁷ All this proved of no avail; the Readeption lords did not win Stafford support. Mountjoy lost his eldest son fighting for Edward IV at Barnet. The death of Warwick at the same battle removed a serious rival to the Staffords in the north Midlands. The loyalty of the Staffords undoubtedly would have influenced

Edward IV's decision to let Duke Henry enter his lands before he had come of age; indeed as early as 7 October 1471 the young man had been given licence to take over the property which was due to come to him after the death of his uncle Sir Henry Stafford a month earlier.⁴⁸

Duke Henry, though blessed (particularly after the death of his grandmother in 1480) with a financial and territorial basis sufficient to maintain his position as one of the leading noblemen of the realm, never acquired the popularity or judgement necessary for the transformation of this into practical and lasting political advantage. His career between 1473 and 1483 unfortunately cannot be documented in the detail necessary for a satisfactory understanding of his character or motivation. Yet it is clear that Henry never enjoyed the influence either nationally or in Staffordshire that his grandfather had built up for the family. Edward IV for some reason chose to exclude Henry from all offices, save the commission of the peace in Staffordshire and the stewardship of England during the attainder of Clarence.⁴⁹ Henry's power in the north Midlands was particularly restricted by his failure to secure the key stewardship of the Honour of Tutbury. This went to William, Lord Hastings, enabling him to become the more influential patron in the area. The rivalry between Buckingham and Hastings was, however, kept in check by the need for a friendship of convenience between the various anti-Wydeville elements in the nobility. As was noted by Sir Thomas More in his History of King Richard the Third, 'these two, not bearing each to other so much love as both bore hatred unto the Queen's party', provided Richard, duke of Gloucester's keystone of support.⁵⁰ Though interleaved between much material of dubious accuracy, this

judgement of More's seems sound. It is certainly in keeping with what is known of north Midland politics at this time and may shed some light upon both the Duke's reaction to the execution of Hastings and on the motives behind the rebellion of October 1483.

Although historians of various eras have offered explanations for Buckingham's revolt, what emerges most clearly (and this is something with which these writers themselves would doubtlessly have concurred) is that this is a subject for speculation rather than confident assertion. The Duke's alienation from Richard III baffled contemporaries as much as it has later scholars. Three possible areas of disaffection have been proposed:

- (i) The murder of the Princes in the Tower
- (ii) The fear of falling like Hastings
- (iii) The Earldom of Hereford

I find the first of these as a primary factor unconvincing. Richard's murdering his nephews can hardly have endeared him to the Duke. Even by the standards of later-medieval realpolitik, the murder of children was scandalous and repugnant; the trick was to keep them incarcerated until adolescence and then murder them. Yet Buckingham certainly accepted the declaration of the Princes' illegitimacy. His reasons for this were similar to those of Richard. With the young king so dominated by his Wydeville relatives, it was only a matter of time, they were thinking, before he turned to them and them alone for advice and to distribute patronage. This would spell danger for all who opposed them.

While Hastings with his greater experience of court politics and manoeuvres sought some sort of accommodation and rapprochement between the differing magnate factions for at least the duration of Edward V's minority, Gloucester

and Buckingham, having seized the initiative along with the young King's person at Stony Stratford, feared to surrender it. For the Dukes, safety seemed to lie in uncompromising extremism and a coup d'etat. Ironically, it was Hastings' apparent diplomatic flexibility which sealed the fate of the princes. Gloucester and Buckingham feared that Hastings might switch sides and, throwing caution to the winds, had him summarily executed.

It was now all or nothing and the children had to be removed. The French chronicler Phillippe de Commines links Buckingham with the dastardly deed, but this seems unlikely. The murders were the work of a calculating, decisive mind; the sort that none of the other chronicles leads us to suppose the Duke possessed. He was, however, a wealthy and powerful patron. After the execution of Hastings, as one observer put it, 'all the Lord Chamberleyne mene be come my lordys of Bokynghame menne.'⁵¹ Whatever scruples Buckingham might have had over the deaths of Hastings and the princes seem to have been suppressed by the need to safeguard his and Gloucester's positions and by the prospect of the power and wealth to come. It is not to the Croyland chronicler's theory of disgust at the murder of the Princes in the Tower, but to events after Gloucester's seizure of the throne that it seems we must look for an explanation of Buckingham's ill-fated rebellion of October 1483.

The murders may have had the effect of opening Duke Henry's eyes to the full determination and ruthlessness of Richard III, especially if, as More reported, the Duke was only informed of these matters after they had been concluded. The sudden fall of Hastings, Edward IV's right-hand

man may have suggested to Buckingham, when he had time to reflect, that his own similar position with respect to Richard might also not be as secure as he thought; after all, had he not married into the Wydevilles? Thomas More presents a succinct appraisal of the Duke's fears. Buckingham was frightened by royal servants with references to his Wydeville connection and inferences about Richard spying on him. More portrays the King as scornfully rejecting Buckingham's petition for the lands of the earldom of Hereford, which rejection angered as much as frightened him. Yet Professor Lander has shown that Richard did produce a sign manual for this property, though no letters patent were ever issued.⁵² Did Richard change his mind, causing the Duke to realise how far from indispensable he was? Another idea put forward by More, that Buckingham was jealous of Richard's new-found majesty and so decided to try for the throne himself, strikes me as less convincing. Even Buckingham must have realised that he could muster even less support than had or could Richard. There was also the matter of Henry Tudor whose claim to the throne, though not stronger than Buckingham's own, was attracting most of whatever support was to be had for a move against Richard.

Buckingham's revolt proved a disaster. By the time Buckingham moved in October 1483 Richard had long known of the plot and of the incitement to rise given to the Duke by Bishop Morton of Ely, who had been entrusted to Buckingham's custody after the fall of Hastings. While Richard consolidated his position in London, Buckingham stayed away on his distant estates in the Welsh marches, gradually building up the determination and forces with

which to march against Richard. He probably summoned men from Staffordshire, as he did from his lands elsewhere; but the response was minimal. John Harcourt of Ellenhall is the only Staffordshire gentleman known to have followed the Duke, and it seems probable that Harcourt, a former household man of Edward IV whose family had prospered under him and had been closely associated with Hastings, took the path to revolt with loyalty to or respect for Buckingham as minor considerations.⁵³ One could not, as did the Duke, merely sit back and wait for troops to flock to one's banner; recruiting an army and motivating it was a craft too long to learn for Henry's short life. He was not popular, and the comment of his half-brother's secretary in a letter of 18 October to Sir Robert Plumpton should not be dismissed as mere invective:

'The Duke of Buck: has so many men, as yt is sayd her, that he is able to goe where he wyll; but I trust he shalbe right withstanded and all his mallice: and els were great pytty.'⁵⁴

On Buckingham's part, the rising was ill-timed and ill-prepared. It found no support among his powerful kinsmen the Stanleys and Blounts. He would have done well to have taken note of the noticeable lack of response he received from members of his affinity.

No sooner had he moved from Brecon to Weobley on the first stage of his progress than his retainers the Vaughans of Talgarth (who had distained to accompany him), realising that they were unlikely to meet him again this side of Paradise, promptly sacked his Brecon castle.⁵⁵ Buckingham found the going difficult and extraordinarily heavy rain dampened what little enthusiasm his troops had. The force was actually little more than a rabble and it

deserted him at the first sign of opposition. Duke Henry was forced into hiding, but even then found loyalty worth little. He was betrayed by a servant and beheaded at Salisbury on 2 November without so much as a formal trial. His sole Staffordshire accomplice escaped to France, where he died in the following year.

Henry lived without the ability of his grandfather Humphrey, and died because of this deficiency. The hard and timeconsuming work necessary for political success was not for him. He failed to recognize that there was no divine right of dukes and found himself simply outclassed at everything to which he turned his hand.

The Staffords' heir was Henry's five-year old son Edward (1478-1521), which meant that the family had yet another minority to endure; the third in the century. Duke Edward and his younger brother Henry were forced into hiding to avoid the wrath of a vengeful king. They evaded capture, Edward at one time having to have his hair cut and to don girls' clothes to escape recognition.

The Stafford family estates were distributed to loyal supporters of Richard in 1484 following Duke Henry's attainder. In Staffordshire, Madeley was granted on 7 March to Sir Thomas Wortley of Sheffield along with the stewardship of all the Duke's estates in the county.⁵⁶ Of those other estates Darlaston, Bentley, Tittensor Hartwell, Packington and the reversion of Norton-in-the Moors were leased to John, Lord Dudley.⁵⁷ In 1485 the attainder of Duke Henry was reversed and these grants were cancelled.

Most of Duke Edward's career belongs to the period after 1500 and so is outside the scope of this thesis to relate. He was given livery of his inheritance in 1494⁵⁸, but the power of the Stafford family rested on his great aunt

Lady Margaret Beaufort, and her former steward, Sir Reynold Bray, who had been involved in the successful invasion by Henry Tudor and was rewarded with the Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster. Lady Margaret had married Thomas Stanley, earl of Derby.

The nobility of Staffordshire were on the whole absentee landlords and patrons. Only the Bishops of Coventry and Lichfield (see chapter four), to a lesser extent John, Lord Dudley and for a time George, duke of Clarence were regular visitors. Clarence was steward of the royal estates in Staffordshire from 1464 to 1473 and spent a lot of time and money at Tutbury on the border with Derbyshire⁵⁹ where the administrative centre of the Duchy of Lancaster's Honour of Tutbury lay. However, the Tuchets no longer frequented Heighley nor the Devereuxs Chartley. The Staffords visited but were not particularly enamoured of Stafford and the Talbots felt the same about Alton.

What lay behind this absenteeism? For families like Audleys and Staffords with estates further south, it may have been that they preferred the countryside, climate and social life away from Staffordshire, which was, if not quite a distant outpost, hardly the hub of the universe. Military service in the Hundred Years' War took the nobility to France, while their advancement in general depended largely upon service for the Crown either on the battlefield or around the chambers of power in London. All of this drew the nobility (and many of the gentry too) away from Staffordshire. For the likes of the Staffords, Talbots and Beauchamp/Neville Earls of Warwick it was also important to be in London and Westminster to advise the King and keep an eye on both affairs of state and the activities of one's rivals. The nobleman of the

fifteenth century was at court for his own good.

The 'new nobility' of Edward IV's reign, men such as William Herbert, John Dinham, William Hastings and from Staffordshire and Derbyshire Walter Blount, ennobled for administrative, legal and/or martial prowess, owed their rise to service which could not be performed on their distant estates. Significantly, the Blounts, who became Lords Mountjoy in 1465 appear increasingly infrequently in north Midland deeds, the longer they stay 'at the top'. Work in London and Westminster brought new friends, interests and priorities, and Staffordshire and Derbyshire were too far away for any but the extraordinarily talented (men such as John Hampton of Stourton and Humphrey Stanley of Elford) successfully to pursue careers in both court and country. Dudley was by far the most adept nobleman in this respect, using power and patronage picked up around the King to strengthen his family's position around his home estates. In this way what might be a short-term tenure of influence for one member of the Dudleys could be used most profitably in the long-term interests of the family.

For a family like the Blounts, it was a long way from the situation of Walter Blount, a beleaguered squire being attacked at Derby in 1454 to Walter's grandson William, Lord Mountjoy, 'so gracious and charming a youth', tutor to Henry VIII. Mountjoy in 1499 was the first man to invite Erasmus to England, and the Dutchman dedicated his Adages to him.⁶⁰ To a family like the Staffords, fate was not to be so kind, and the fall of Duke Edward in 1521 destroyed them as a power in the land and eventually in Staffordshire as well. Staffordshire during and just after the Wars of the Roses rang the changes in the personnel of government, the structure of noble-gentry relations and the vagaries of fortune. These form much of the rest of the thesis: a tale of sic transit gloria mundi

FOOTNOTES

1. C.Erickson, The Medieval Vision, (New York, 1976), p.153.
2. J.Strachey and others (eds.), Rotuli Parliamentorum, (London, 1767-77), V, pp.231-3. Yorkshire had the most onerous financial charge- that of paying for 713 men.
3. Ibid., VI, pp.111ff. The total tenth granted amounted to £31, 411. All these figures have been rounded off to the nearest pound.
4. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1436-41, p.84.
5. G.E.C[ockayne], The Complete Peerage, (ed.) V.H.Gibbs and others, (London, 1910-59), I, p.341.
6. C.D.Ross, Edward IV, (London, 1974), p.80.
7. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1467-77, p.22; see also note 6.
8. Audley got a Crown annuity of £100 in April 1474 and was appointed Master of the King's Hounds two months later- Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1467-77, pp.440, 444. The 1461 grant of the stewardship of royal lands in Dorset was made for life in 1478, at which time Audley also received a grant of the wardenship and constableness of Corfe castle- Ibid., 1476-85, p.68.
9. Rotuli Parliamentorum, VI, p.127; Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1467-77, p.483.
10. J.Ward, The Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent, (London, 1843), p.143.
11. B.P.Wolfe, The Crown Lands 1461-1536, (London, 1970), p.144.
12. See the article on him in G.E.C., The Complete Peerage, IV, pp.479-80 for much of the basic biographical details used in this section on Dudley. He also possessed land in Staffordshire at Harbourne, Penn, Prestwood-by-Stourbridge and Sedgley.
13. Calendar of Close Rolls, 1429-35, pp.190-2.
14. Public Record Office (cited as PRO), Writs and Warrants for Issues of the Exchequer, E404/57/272. This authorises a payment to Dudley, as keeper of Calais, of £1120 for back wages there. The warrant is dated 30 May 1441.
15. H.S.Grazebrook, 'The Barons of Dudley', Collections for a History of Staffordshire (cited as SHC), William Salt Archaeological Society, IX (1888), ii, p.66.
16. Calendar of Charter Rolls, 5 Henry VI to 8 Henry VIII, (H.M.S.O., 1927), pp.69-70.
17. PRO, E404/58/207.
18. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1441-46, p.281.

19. Rotuli Parliamentorum, V, p.191. Profits of over £100 from Seisdon hundred were also left him.
20. For instance, see Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1452-61, p.265; Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1452-61, pp.536, 543, 586.
21. J.R.Lander, Government and Community: England 1450-1509, (London, 1980), p.221.
22. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1452-61, pp.543-4. See also S.Shaw, The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire, (London, 1798-1801), II, pp.139-40.
23. A.C.Ewald, 'Calendar of French Rolls- Henry VI', Forty-Eighth Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, (London, 1887), p.444.
24. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1461-67, pp.120, 332, 458, 541.
25. G.E.C., The Complete Peerage, IV, pp.479-80.
26. Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1471-85, pp.298-9. See also Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476-85, p.137.
27. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1485-94, p.97.
28. Ibid., 1485-94, pp.83-4.
29. The general history of these struggles has been written up by M.C.Carpenter in her thesis Political Society in Warwickshire c1401-72, (unpublished Cambridge PhD thesis, 1976) and her article 'The Beauchamp Affinity: a study of bastard feudalism at work', English Historical Review, XCV (1980), pp.514-32.
30. Calendar of Close Rolls, 1441-47, pp.288-9.
31. Ibid., 1454-61, pp.49-50.
32. Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1445-52, pp.159, 161; Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1452-61, p.49.
33. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1485-94, pp.118; Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem-Henry VII, (H.M.S.O., 1898-1955), I, no.841, where he was a feoffee for Humphrey Salway of Cannock; Staffordshire Record Office, D(W)1721/3/105. With the last of these three deeds connecting Ferrers and Staffordshire comes his signature 'J.Deveuxioueff' and a magnificent seal. The deed is a grant of a wardship and marriage, dating from 1500.
34. L.Drucker, Warwickshire Feet of Fines, III, 1345-1509, Dugdale Society, XVIII (1943), no.2740.
35. C.Rawcliffe, The Staffords, Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham 1394-1521, (Unpublished Sheffield PhD thesis, 1974). There is also a book by Dr. Rawcliffe bearing the same name as the thesis published by the Cambridge University Press in 1978.
36. G.Wrottesley, 'Final Concords or Pedes Finium, commencing 1 Edward III', SHC, XI (1890), pp.232, 243.

37. K.B.McFarlane, The Nobility of Later Medieval England, (Oxford, 1973), p.201.
38. Rawcliffe, The Staffords, p. 93. Unless otherwise stated all quotations are from the book rather than the thesis-see note 35.
39. Duke Humphrey did have eight other children by his wife Anne (daughter of Ralph Neville, earl of Westmorland and Joan Beaufort). Of these, only Catherine who married the third Earl of Shrewsbury, Sir Henry who married the mother of the future Henry VII and John, earl of Wiltshire are worthy of note here.
40. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1452-61, p.639.
41. See Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1461-71, pp.11, 40, 62. Richard Neville, earl of Warwick and later William, Lord Herbert received custody of the Staffords' south Wales estates.
42. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1461-67, p.298.
43. Ross, Edward IV, p.94.
44. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1452-61, pp.557-61, 603-4.
45. Rawcliffe, The Stafford Family, p.225; Staffordshire Record Office, D641/1/2/25 m.1^R. This latter reference is to an authorisation for a payment to Hastings of two years' worth of his annuity by Anne, duchess of Buckingham in 1467.
46. PRO, Patent Rolls, Supplementary, Pardon Rolls, C67/44 m.8; Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1471-85, pp.22-3.
47. Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1461-71, pp.281-2.
48. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1467-77, p.298.
49. D.A.L.Morgan, 'The King's Affinity in the Polity of Yorkist England', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, fifth series XXIII (1973), pp.18 note 64, 19 note 68.
50. Sir Thomas More, History of King Richard the Third, in P.Kendall (ed.), Richard III: the Great Debate, (London, 1965), p.42.
51. C.L.Kingsford (ed.), The Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483, Camden Society, third series, XXX (1919), no.331.
52. Lander, Government and Community, p.318.
53. For details of Harcourt's attainder, see Rotuli Parliamentorum, VI, p.247 and Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476-85, p.371. This attainder was reversed in the first parliament of Henry VII- Rotuli Parliamentorum, VI, pp.273-4.
54. T.Stapleton (ed.), Plumpton Correspondence: a series of letters, domestic, written in the reigns of Edward IV, Richard III, Henry VII and Henry VIII, Camden Society, IV (1839), p.45.

55. Staffordshire Record Office, D(W)1721/1/11 fo.241. There is a nineteenth-century transcript of the document from which this reference is drawn, in H.Owen and J.B.Blakeway, A History of Shrewsbury, (London, 1825), I, pp.235-42.
56. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476-85, p.415, 437.
57. Ibid., 1476-85, pp.422-5. He also leased property in Bridgenorth and Rokesby (Warwickshire).
58. Ibid., 1494-1509, p.133.
59. M.A.Hicks, False, Fleeting, Perjur'd Clarence, (Gloucester, 1980), p.195.
60. R.H.Bainton, Erasmus of Christendom, (New York, 1969), (Fontana Paperback version London, 1972), p.73.

CHAPTER II

LOCAL GOVERNMENT, WAR AND PATRONAGE

This chapter is a chronological study of the offices of local government during the second half of the fifteenth century. The dates 1440-1500 have been chosen partly because (despite what some might argue) one has to start and end somewhere, and partly because these dates allow one to examine the situation before and after the Wars of the Roses in this county, gauging relative changes in the histories of the principal families. Into this survey have been inserted sections on the military participation of the inhabitants of Staffordshire and the structure of the gentry and magnate community.

Within the ranks of the appointees to the shrievalty, escheatorship and commissions are to be found the major gentry families and a fair sprinkling of lesser families, who were represented by an able member, often the retainer of a powerful local lord. In broad terms, the shrievalty was occupied by men of a higher social class than was the escheatorship, while for the commissions eligibility depended on one having

- (i) Ability
- (ii) Political acceptability
- (iii) A 'reasonable' amount of property within the county.

A person generally needed at least two of these factors- which two was unimportant. The attitude prevalent in later centuries that a particular family was entitled to occupy one of these local government posts as of right had not as yet developed in Staffordshire- or if it had, it was not generally enough held to exercise any influence upon appointments. Family pedigree counted for little and fools were not suffered gladly, as the Staffords of Grafton were to discover. On the other hand, a string of able men in a family could soon raise that family's status and wealth, as can be seen by following the histories of the Egertons, Curzons of Kedleston, Agards and Levesons. It is with the characters of the office-holders, their patrons and the phases of magnate power

that I am mainly concerned. Thus, using biographical evidence, I want to examine who the leading county office-holders were and what their relationship with the local noblemen was, both in theory and practice.

Much of the political history of Staffordshire in the 1440s and 1450s was an extension of that of Warwickshire, where Humphrey, earl of Stafford (and from 1444 duke of Buckingham) contested supremacy with the Beauchamp and Neville earls of Warwick.¹ Within Staffordshire itself only one of the minor noble families, the Lords Ferrers of Chartley, was a real force in local politics. As for the others, the Tuchets of Audley were preoccupied with their estates in Herefordshire and the south-west; Sir John Sutton, Lord Dudley, while active as a soldier and diplomat² and well rewarded by the Crown³, was curiously reluctant to commit himself in local affairs, though he did maintain a close link with Richard, duke of York until the 1450s.⁴ Otherwise, only Warwick and the Butler earls of Wiltshire held more than a manor in the county.⁵

The Ferrers family held a tightly-knit estate of manors grouped to the east of Stafford, Great Barr in the south of the county and considerable lands in Warwickshire. During the second quarter of the fifteenth century they were rarely on the best of terms with the Staffords, since Lord Edmund (1389-1435) was the major ally in northern Warwickshire of the Beauchamp Earls of Warwick.⁶ The marriage of his widow to her neighbour Sir Philip Chetwynd in 1437 temporarily eased things however, for Chetwynd (a wealthy Staffordshire and Shropshire knight) was an integral part of the Stafford affinity. By the early 1440s both Chetwynd and his wife were dead and Buckingham's interest in north Warwickshire had frightened, and traditional links with the Beauchamps had beckoned, Edmund's son and heir William (1412-50) once more into the ranks of those set

against the expansion of Stafford power in the area. William seems to have had only a limited success in holding together his family's affinity and getting their support for the break with Buckingham so far as Staffordshire was concerned. The lasting effect of the temporary understanding between the Ferrers and Stafford families in the late 1430s was that the latter drew to them a number of the former's associated gentlemen- in particular William Cumberford, William Mountfort and in time the Vernons.

By the time of his sudden and early death Lord William could see that his family's affinity was deeply and possibly irrecoverably divided. He had thrown in his lot with Richard Neville as that man pursued the thankless task of trying to rebuild the old Beauchamp affinity. In a letter from Neville to Ferrers, written only days before the latter's death, the Earl expressed his thanks for

'the zeale and hertely cousyninge to me showed
at al tymes in many and diverse behalves. And
in especial now late for ye sendyng of your
men to me my last going to the parliament.'7

William died leaving a widow who took as her dower most of his Warwickshire property and who survived until 1471, and a twelve year-old daughter, the Lady Anne. Anne was married to Walter Devereux, the heir to a considerable inheritance in Herefordshire and the Welsh marches and from one of the staunchest gentry families supporting Richard, duke of York. That the Devereuxs, who were themselves not loath to employ violence to further their political aims, ignored Staffordshire as a sphere of activity was certainly to Buckingham's intense relief. The use to which York or Warwick could have put the Ferrers position after 1450 was ignored. It is against this background of the break-up of the Ferrers affinity and the attempts by Warwick and Buckingham to further their own affinities that the political history of

Staffordshire in the 1430s and 1440s is set. Both magnates had areas of special interest, Buckingham in the Peak District where his own land-holdings were weak⁸, and Warwick in the south of the county, taking advantage of discontented elements in the local gentry.

The obvious connections between power and political or legal office holding have led historians to study grants of, and appointments to, positions of profit and authority as the standard method of analysing changing patterns of power within a locality. However, many careers are poorly documented and often the amount of surviving biographical material is such as to make many conclusions little more than conjecture. Nevertheless, some impression of the important gentry figures in the county can be gleaned.

It was through the gentry that royal and magnate power was principally exercised and evident. Only by protecting and furthering the interests of such as were of goodwill towards him could a lord achieve the same for himself. Similarly, it was by obtaining good lordship that a gentleman was best able to preserve and enhance his position and possessions. Strings clearly linked and co-ordinated the movements of gentry and nobility, lord and retainer, patron and appointee, but which was the puppet and which the puppeteer is less easily determined.

A letter from Margaret of Anjou in 1448 to a set of north Warwickshire burgesses illustrates the working of patronage:

'We be enformed that the recordership of the cite of Coventre is like within shorte tyme to be voide, unto your disposicion and yefte; We, desiring th'encres, firtherance and preferring of oure welbeloved T. Bate, aswel for his suffitant of cunnyng and habillite thereto as in especial for the humble instance and praier of certein oure servants right negh attending aboute oure persone, pray yow right hertly that....ye wil have the seid T. unto the seid occupacion of recorder.'⁹

On this occasion the powerful Humphrey, duke of Buckingham was

behind the whispering in the Queen's ear. Thomas Bate was a talented lawyer who had married into the Cockayne family and joined the Stafford affinity of the area. He sat on the Warwickshire bench from 1441 until his death eighteen years later, twice represented that county in parliament (1442 and 1449), and was escheator there in 1448-9 and in Staffordshire in 1451-2. He was retained as a lawyer by Buckingham in 1447, around which time he was appointed ranger and bowbearer in the royal forest of Cannock. Other profitable offices, such as the keepership of herbage and pannage, were also in the hands of Stafford supporters at this time.¹⁰ Significantly, Buckingham's fee was only awarded after Bate had established himself as a leading figure in north Warwickshire. As will be seen repeatedly, the Duke preferred to reward and recruit men of proven rather than potential ability.

Although the Staffords were by far the most powerful magnate family in Staffordshire at this time, the number of their retainers in the county was fairly small. Some of the fees paid to their councillors are unknown, but I estimate that during the 1440s and 1450s Buckingham was paying out between £150 and £175 a year to Staffordshire men. There was a distinct scale of payments relating to social status and the kind of service rendered. Lawyers received £2, minor gentlemen five marks, the middling gentry £5 or ten marks, and the major gentry £10. Fees above £10 were exceptional and indicated a position of prominence within the affinity. This was all strictly a business arrangement based upon an appraisal of the individual's value to the Duke- which in turn owed more to ability than pure rank. Nobody was retained simply because he held a large amount of property within the area. Ralph Egerton of Wrinehill and his son Hugh were both retained at ten marks a year because they were equally talented

and forceful, but the annuity paid to the head of the Vernon family was halved on the death of the wily ex-speaker of the House of Commons, Sir Richard, from £20 to the £10 paid to his colourless son William.

However, there is no simple equation which shows that all those retained by a particular lord were his men and his alone. Although fees were not as liberally distributed as is sometimes thought, many men accepted them from several patrons. Lawyers, such as Bate and William Burley, were particularly prone so to behave. Bate, with his skilful political manoeuvring, maintained links with both Warwick and Buckingham, but he was an exception. Similarly, a lack of evidence of a gentleman being retained does not imply that close ties did not exist between him and a particular lord. Not all connections were made through the indenture normally associated with 'bastard feudalism'. Many gentlemen served their lords as tenants, estate officials, feoffees or witnesses to his deeds.

I want now to turn to appointments to the four major county offices: sheriff, escheator, member of parliament and commissioner. I also want to examine how far and in what respect the holders of the offices can be linked to magnates, particularly Buckingham.

Although appointees often had magnate connections and several were even retainers and although over a dozen of both the sheriffs and escheators of Staffordshire in the 1440s and 1450s can be linked in some way to Buckingham, such a fact should be used with caution. Those with close ties were few. If it were rare for anyone with strong Beauchamp or Neville connections to be appointed (such as Richard Archer in 1441-2 or the younger Thomas Astley ten years later), this does not necessarily mean that the

shrievalty was generally in the gift of the Staffords. Only two of the sheriffs, William Mitton and Sir John Gresley the elder, were their retainers and both were also leading gentlemen of the county, who might reasonably be expected to have occupied that office at some time.

Five of the escheators had been retained by Buckingham by the time they took up their duties and two more afterwards. Some of these lesser men, for escheators were generally drawn from a lower social class than the sheriffs, were certainly placemen. These include John Barbour, escheator for 1446-7, who had been retained five years earlier and regularly sat in parliament for Buckingham's pocket borough of Stafford. There was also Humphrey Cotes, escheator for 1422-4 and 1440-1, whose second appointment had been in flagrant disregard of a ruling by the royal Council during Henry VI's minority that 'no Man beyng Steward with eny lorde, be neither Shirriefts, ne Eschetours, in the Shires that he is officer inne'.¹¹ Cotes possessed considerable financial expertise, built up in over a generation spent in Stafford service. He ended his career as not only Buckingham's steward but also his receiver for Staffordshire. It was Cotes and William Mitton, sheriff in 1442-3 and 1457-8, who were called upon to lead a protective detachment of levies down to London at the Duke's command to 'await' upon him at London during the troubled early summer of 1450.¹² Cotes' successor in the receivership of the ducal lands in Staffordshire was Roger Draycote of Paynsley. Draycote too was quickly appointed escheator, in December 1452. William Humphreston, escheator for 1456-7, forged his ties with the Staffords back in the 1430s, when he enlisted their support to secure his deceased wife's inheritance in Blymhill. Stafford was made Humphreston's

remainderman and, as the latter was going to die without issue, by using his position as feudal overlord and arbitrator to settle the dispute in Humphreston's favour, Stafford acquired both a grateful ally and in time an addition to his already-extensive land-holdings in the county.¹³

One of the articles of impeachment brought against the Duke of Suffolk in 1450 was that he had

'caused to be made dyvers persones to be Shirreves...som for the lucre of good (sic), and som to be appliable to his entent and commaundement to fulfyll his desires and writynges for such as hym liked to th'entent to enhaunce hymself.'¹⁴

Such a charge, biased as it may have been in this case, could hardly have been justifiably levelled against Buckingham or Warwick in Staffordshire. For the shrievalty was never as controlled by either man as were the commissions by Buckingham. That so many incumbents apparently had no close ties with either magnate at a time when there was a struggle for influence in the county and especially among the members of the Ferrers affinity suggests one of two things. It is either that there was a measure of sharing out of the onerous task of being sheriff among those of fit rank, which owed more to availability and willingness to serve than to faction, or that the burden of office made 'willing' incumbents difficult to find, even among those closely allied to the rival lords. With many opportunities for being fined and few for profit, a sheriff considered himself fortunate if he were only marginally out of pocket at the end of his term of office. Long gone were the days of appointees lining those pockets with ill-gotten gains.

One sheriff, however, did leave office satisfied. He was Humphrey Swynnerton of Swynnerton, sheriff in 1449-50. He and his escheator, Richard Beaufo (a Neville import from

Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire), somehow used their offices to snap up the wealthiest heiresses of their generation- Anne and Alice Swynnerton of Hilton. In doing so, they divided both the family estates and also its hereditary offices of steward and bailiff of Cannock forest. This may have been an instance of an agreed division between the competing Stafford and Beauchamp/Neville affinities. Both the girls' father, Thomas, and Humphrey Swynnerton were Stafford men; Humphrey had only received seisin of his inheritance from his feudal overlord, Buckingham, in 1447 on coming of age¹⁵, and surely needed the Duke's active support to become sheriff at the age of only twenty-three. Beaufo, on the other hand, was an associate of the young Richard Neville into whose hands the Beauchamp inheritance had recently passed. Such luck, however, was rare.

Some gentlemen refused outright to serve. It took all the guile and connections of John Hampton of Stourton to wriggle his way out of his appointment as sheriff in 1448. His name was the one 'pricked' by the King, but either he then successfully pleaded that his other duties both at court or in Staffordshire would not allow him time for his shrieval duties, or he used some other excuse to escape this unwanted office. His achievement resulted in the existing sheriff, Thomas Ferrers of Tamworth, being forced to remain in office for a second, consecutive term. Hampton's objection to being appointed must have been vehement and may not have been to Buckingham's liking; for Ferrers was a leading member of the old Ferrers of Chartley affinity which, though in some disarray was being effectively courted and regrouped by Warwick.¹⁶

A third possible reason for the appointment of 'non-aligned' sheriffs at various times may have been that

it was recognized that a sheriff who had made an enemy out of one of the major lords in the county, especially Buckingham, would find it difficult, if not impossible, to act effectively and certainly could not bank upon noble support in pursuance of his duties. However, it is unnecessary to seek political motives behind the appointment of every sheriff and escheator. Blatant partisanship appears, not surprisingly, to have been most pronounced in time of national rather than local political stress. In any case, these appointments cannot be satisfactorily explained in purely political terms.

Although some degree of inter-marriage between the leading county families is to be expected, the frequency with which kinsmen held office in Staffordshire is such as to make coincidence unlikely. Sir Thomas Blount, sheriff in 1444-5, was followed in office by his first cousin and friend Sir John Griffith. The sheriff and escheator for 1450-1 and knights of the shire as well, John Stanley and John Gresley the younger, were brothers-in-law, while the next sheriff, Thomas Astley, was Gresley's uncle. In 1452-3 the sheriff and escheator, Robert Aston and Roger Draycote, were again brothers-in-law. Aston's daughter married the eldest son of the next sheriff, while his own eldest son wed the sister of John Delves, sheriff in 1455-6. Three years later another of Delves' brothers-in-law, Hugh Egerton, was sheriff too. This already complicated pattern could be made even more so by including members of parliament and office holders from adjacent counties, but I think that the point has been made. Other examples will appear during the course of this chapter, increasing the evidence for sheriffs often having a say in the choice of their escheators, just as they did the lesser officials who worked under them at Stafford.

Although Staffordshire was several days ride from Westminster and never experienced the appointment of placemen from the royal household in the way that counties nearer to central government did (royal patronage in Staffordshire being expressed in terms of grants of money from the county farm or of offices in the Duchy of Lancaster), its own appointments did not go totally unaffected by the vicissitudes of national politics. Dr. Jeffs in his thesis on the sheriffs at this time sees the influence of Richard, duke of York in 1453 as not yet all-pervasive, and prefers to characterise the following two years as ones when sheriffs appointed were

'For the most part, when not the Duke's present intimates or associates- or his intimates or associates of the future.... men of comparatively small account and estate, unused to county office and to being knights of the shire. Perhaps the governing clique's intention in this had been to appoint men who could be dominated easily.'¹⁷

The shrieval appointments in Staffordshire for 1453, 1454 and 1455 certainly support Dr. Jeffs' first point. They were, in order, Richard Bagot, a Stafford retainer and powerful figure in county politics; John Cotton, a political non-entity with minor Duchy of Lancaster connections; and John Delves, a man of growing importance with property at Uttoxeter and along the Staffordshire-Cheshire border, who had learned much from his close friends the Egertons of Wrinchill and had been recruited by the Earl of Warwick. It was also in 1454 that Warwick and York managed to get themselves appointed to the Staffordshire commission of the peace, though they were singularly unsuccessful at bringing any of their supporters with them on to the bench. The degree to which the county remained committed to the court party and dominated by Buckingham can be gauged by the inability or unwillingness

of the sheriff to organise the return of Yorkist partisans to the parliament of 1455. Dr. Jeffs' second point, about York possibly securing the appointment of sheriffs who could be easily dominated loses some of its force for Staffordshire because a study of the political allegiance of the county gentry in the 1450s and opening years of Yorkist rule shows just how small a powerbase the Duke and Warwick were able to build up during this time. In Staffordshire at least they simply did not have the resources to dominate the machinery of county government with so few willing to come out openly on their behalf. Even the 'non-entity' John Cotton was more a Duchy man than York's and had as his associates men like Ralph Pole of Radbourne and the Vernons who had been taken up by Buckingham rather than the Beauchamp/Neville earls after the break-up of the Ferrers affinity.¹⁸ It was only after Buckingham's death that Warwick's gentry allies, men such as the Wrottesleys and Harcourts and the turncoat Sir John Stanley could come to the fore in county affairs. While the Duke lived his control, though challenged, still held. During the late 1450s this continued Stafford dominance was evident in the selection of the sheriff, and such firm supporters of the family as John Cotes, William Mitton, Hugh Egerton and the afore-mentioned John Stanley were appointed.

Although the list of Staffordshire sheriffs at this time includes many of the major gentry families of the county, there is a definite bias towards those from the south and east of the county, explicable only in terms of the power of the Duchy of Lancaster's Honour of Tutbury. Crown land within the Honour occupied much of eastern Staffordshire and western Derbyshire, with isolated pockets around Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stafford and Wolverhampton. The Duchy offered a

wealth of patronage in terms of leases and offices in its extensive properties. Apart from a short period in the 1440s, Buckingham was steward of the Honour from 1439 until his death, and also held the concomitant posts of constable of Tutbury castle and master-forester of Needwood. Using this base, he was able to direct patronage towards his supporters. For example, the Whitgreves became stewards of Newcastle-under-Lyme, while Thomas Arblaster was appointed surveyor of Needwood chase.

Duchy influence is also clearly visible in county appointments of the mid-1440s while Buckingham was not in control of the Honour. The sheriffs from 1443-45 (Nicholas Montgomery, Sir Thomas Blount and Sir John Griffith) were all important gentry figures around the Honour. That their respective escheators (Nicholas Leveson, Nicholas Warings and Humphrey Blount) were also Duchy men may indicate, especially when added to the evidence concerning kinship among office holders, that sheriffs had a considerable say in the choice of those alongside whom they had to work. It may also reveal an attempt to bring in out-of-county men or at least those with divided loyalties to challenge Buckingham's supremacy in the shire. For, significantly, these appointments coincided with the period when his rival Henry Beauchamp, duke of Warwick had replaced him as steward of the Honour. Had Beauchamp not died suddenly, this importance of the Duchy in county appointments would certainly have increased. As it was, after 1446 Buckingham regained the leading Duchy offices and the significance of the Honour lessened as far as county posts were concerned. Perhaps the Duke was just unsure of the allegiance of the leading Duchy gentlemen.

By November 1459 rebellion had been declared and the Staffordshire sheriff, John Stanley, like the others appointed then, was called upon to maintain local support for Henry VI and suppress the Yorkists. Part of what Stanley was expected to do was so to manipulate the parliamentary elections that (as an albeit pro-Yorkist chronicler put it) 'they that were chosenne knyghtes of the shyres, and other that had interesse in the parlement, were not dyfferent but chosen a denominacione of thaym that were enemyes' to the Yorkist leadership.¹⁹ In fact, the usual features of parliamentary manipulation were not needed in Staffordshire. Buckingham exercised a regular control over parliamentary representation in five of the six Staffordshire seats: the two knights of the shire, both members from Stafford borough and one of those from that of Newcastle-under-Lyme. 'Control' does not mean that he could force his choice upon the county. Such a policy, had it been pursued, would have produced massive gentry resentment. It was just that no-one unacceptable to the Duke might reasonably hope to get returned.

Besides the Newcastle seat controlled by Buckingham, there was another there in the gift of the Crown. In theory this meant the steward of the Duchy of Lancaster, in practice the choice was often that of the Duchy's principal local officer, the steward of the Honour of Tutbury- Buckingham again! It is little wonder, then, that the Duchy nominee was regularly a Staffordshire man connected with Buckingham, such as William Cumberford (recruited from the Ferrers affinity) or Thomas Everdon in 1449. Sometimes the seat was filled by an individual connected to one of the Duke's associates, like John Hampton's friend Thomas Mayne of Colchester for the parliament of 1449-50. In the disturbed political

atmosphere surrounding the 1450 election no name was put forward by either the steward of the Duchy or Buckingham, so the opportunity was taken to return two local burgesses, Thomas Colcough and Richard Mosley. On other occasions, as in 1453 and 1455, the Duchy nominee was a true placeman, John Spencer, a merchant from Kingston-upon-Hull, which town was under the influence of the Duke of Somerset, then steward of the Duchy. The Duchy presence in Newcastle was also evident in 1447 when the treasurer of the queen's chamber, Edward Ellesmere, was appointed constable there.²⁰ This was a sinecure appointment for a favoured courtier. Ellesmere had nothing to do with north Staffordshire and his duties were undertaken by a deputy.

It should not necessarily be assumed that a borough resented the loss of the dubious privilege of parliamentary representation. Civic rights could better be protected and extended with magnate support and, as in the following century, this could be achieved by the surrender of the choice of the return of borough members to magnate patronage. In Stafford itself any tension there might have been between Buckingham's desire to install placemen and burgess sensibilities was circumvented by his use of local associates, such as the Whitgreves of Burton-by-Stafford, the Barbours of Forebridge and in the 1430s William Hexstall.²¹ Neither were Stafford burgesses ignored. Such was the Duke's position that most had some connection with him. Men like William Garnet, Nicholas Ashby, William Preston and Robert Atkinson were townsfolk whom Buckingham could trust to look after his interests as well as those of their borough.²² More than in most boroughs at the time, the dividing line in Stafford between out-and-out placemen and leading burgesses was thin and indistinctly drawn.

The precise part played by magnates in parliamentary elections in the fifteenth century for knights of the shire varied from county to county and has yet to be adequately determined. Magnate influence was certainly less significant than in borough elections. That a candidate in Staffordshire had Buckingham's support counted for much, but it was hardly decisive. Bearing in mind the Duke's need for support, the number of gentlemen he could afford to oppose directly should they decide to stand was severely limited. Those elected usually had an independent standing within the shire or, as with the likes of John Hampton and Robert Whitgreve, had developed influential roles for themselves at Westminster. These were men to be worked with and through, rather than unquestioning adherents to factional or magnate directives. They recognized their responsibility to represent and protect the interests of those local groups by whom they had been elected, particularly in the matter of taxation.

A man like Hampton who (links with the Staffords aside) already knew his way to and through the chambers of power was a likelier candidate than some backwoods novice. So it is hardly surprising to discover that Hampton was elected in 1437, 1439, 1442, 1445, twice in 1449, 1453 and probably again in 1459. His companions varied, though all were men of influence, experience and ability. Several were colleagues from the Staffordshire bench: Thomas Arblaster (1439), Robert Whitgreve (1445 and 1449-50) and William Cumberford (1449). The others were leaders of the county gentry: John Mynors (1437), Ralph Egerton (1442) and the younger John Gresley (1453).

Before dealing with the county commissions of these decades, I want briefly to sketch some general patterns concerning such bodies over the longer period dealt with in

this thesis. For example, the way in which there was a marked increase in the number of men appointed to the commissions of the peace between 1440 and 1500, particularly among the gentry.

REIGN/PERIOD	AVERAGE NUMBER OF COMMISSIONERS	NUMBER OF COMMISSIONS
1440-61	14	12
1461-70	18	8
1470-71	13	1
1471-83	21	7
Edward V	nil	nil
1483-85	18	5
<u>1485-1500</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>8</u>
1440-1500	17	41

One obvious theory for the increase in the number of these commissions and commissioners is that this reflected tension in society at a wider level. However, while this may be true for the 1450s and 1460s, it is hard to equate with later decades. What seems likely is that extra men were appointed in times of stress (often to bolster the position of a particular faction) and that these were not removed when things quietened down, possibly for fear of offending them. Such men, when they did retire or die off or were removed in a political volte-face, tended to be replaced; it seeming that a space on the commission was thus vacated. In such a way was the numerical strength of the commissions enhanced. How far this process was supplemented by the need for additional commissioners because of a increasing number and widening variety of cases coming before them is uncertain, though doubtlessly that played some part in the general trend.

The overall figure of forty-one commissions of the peace in Staffordshire between 1440 and 1500 compares with forty-three for Derbyshire, forty-nine for Shropshire, sixty for Warwickshire and thirty-eight for Worcestershire. This wide variation emphasises the dangers in generalising from one county to another. Even these figures hide variations within certain

shires. Worcestershire had only eight commissions appointed between 1440 and 1460, while Shropshire had twenty during that period. Conversely, in the initial three and a half years of Henry VII's reign Worcestershire had an amazing seven commissions compared to only two for Warwickshire. As far as Staffordshire is concerned, the frequency with which commissions of the peace were called was fairly regular- averaging out at about one every eighteen months. Only in that troubled year 1483 were there more than two commissions appointed (three) and even then one of those was necessitated by the accession of a new king.

Gradually, as the size of the commissions increased, the proportion of noblemen ~~thereon~~ decreased. Even under Henry VII this can hardly be seen as a deliberate policy. Minorities and attainders often intervened to further strengthen the hand of the gentry commissioners; for there was only a limited number of suitable noblemen. As it was many of those appointed had little or no connection with the county- even those who did hold property there. Together with this decline in the proportion of noblemen on the commissions was a more important decline in their influence. The bulk of the work of the commissions had long been left in the hands of gentry appointees, but during the second half of the fifteenth century the nature of the relationship between lord and gentleman commissioner altered. This can best be illustrated by comparing briefly county commissions in the 1430s and the 1490s. In the former besides the heads of the three 'noble' families of the shire (the Staffords, Tuchets and Suttons), were to be found their gentry military associates and such eminent jurists as the area could boast of- men such as Sir John Bagot and Sir Roger Aston in the first category and William Lee and Richard Lane in the second. The commissions were small and select and, although they included members of the gentry like Hugh Erdeswick whose spirits ran wild and free, there remained a perceptible if ~~unspoken~~

noble dominance. Though some might kick against the leash, gentry appointees were lord's men. By the end of the century the power of the Stanleys, Egertons and the like had left them, if not scornful of the pretensions and machinations of the nobility, certainly unwilling to be mere ciphers or even the trusted lieutenants of their social superiors. They served because they rather than the magnates controlled the shire, and they were appointed as worthies in their own right. This rise of the gentry (there is no other term for it) was fostered by different combinations of reasons in different counties. In Staffordshire one major reason was the absence for long periods of an effective, indigenous nobility. As will be shown later, all the magnates who attempted to build a powerbase within the county, with the exception of the Staffords, had to work through and consequently allow a greater than usual degree of autonomy and influence to those of the gentry whom they had recruited. This too increased the independence of that class in the area.

Returning to the decades with which I was dealing until making these general observations on the county commissions of the period, between 1440 and the accession of Edward IV twenty-seven major commissions were issued for Staffordshire. Of these seventeen concerned internal security (including twelve commissions of the peace), while the remainder dealt with measures designed to alleviate the Crown's pressing financial difficulties—principally the need to fund the war in France. Such commissions neatly summarise the central government's view of the localities as areas of crime and sources of income. Although influential members of the lay and clerical nobility were appointed to these commissions, only rarely are such lords as Buckingham and Ferrers noted as joining the commissioners on duty (this might

occur if they had a special interest in securing a particular verdict) and no example can be found of any bishop of Coventry and Lichfield presiding.²³ The work was left to the gentry appointees. An example of this can be seen in the commission of 3 June 1440 to inquire into who was eligible to pay the alien subsidy. The commissioners as appointed for Staffordshire included Suffolk, Stafford, Talbot (later, the Earl of Shrewsbury), Audley and Dudley; together with six county gentlemen and the sheriff. When the inquiries were eventually held, in Stafford on 22 April 1443 and Wolverhampton on 16 July 1443, only two of the gentlemen turned up, to be joined by a later sheriff and another gentleman not originally appointed.²⁴

Excluding the Shropshire and Worcestershire contingents of the three-counties commission of June 1458 and occasions when an 'office' rather than a specific individual was appointed to a commission, twenty-eight gentry commissioners sat on twenty-seven commissions in this period. The total number of appearances by these gentlemen was one hundred and sixty-two. Six of these were both councillors and retainers of Buckingham (Thomas Arblaster, William Cumberford, Hugh Erdeswick, John Harper, William Lee and Robert Whitgreve); a further six were also retained by him (Hugh Egerton, John Gresley the younger, Robert Grey, John Hampton, Sir Richard and William Vernon); two others had a record of long service to his family (Sir Roger Aston and Roger Draycote); and one more (William Vernon) was also retained by Buckingham's son Humphrey, Lord Stafford. These men account for almost

three-quarters of all gentry appearances, despite the fact that half of these men could only muster eleven appearances between them.

There was a stranglehold on the commissions by a quintet of Stafford family placemen: Thomas Arblaster, John Hampton, John Harper, William Cumberford and Robert Whitgreve. By the mid-1450s the exclusion of those outside the Stafford affinity had become especially obvious. The Duke's control was most noticeable with the commissions of the peace. Not only was one of the two regular royal justices on the bench, William Yelverton, in his pay and on his council, but the local gentry membership was also so dominated by the Stafford connection that membership was virtually by personal invitation of the Duke only.

Arblaster, Hampton and Harper were on all the commissions of the peace from 1439 to 1461. Lee was on the first of these (having served also throughout the previous two decades), then was succeeded by Cumberford; both were lawyers for the Staffords. The only other changes among the gentry on the bench between 1439 and 1453 were caused by the deaths of Sir Roger Aston in 1449 and Robert Whitgreve three years later. On both occasions one Stafford servant was replaced by another- Whitgreve by Roger Draycote and Aston by Sir Sampson Meverell.

Aston headed a powerful gentry family hailing from the Cannock chase region of central Staffordshire. After spending much of his life as an administrator for the Staffords, he turned to local government in the 1420s, becoming sheriff 1426-7 and 1431-2 and a regular member of all manner of county commission. Nevertheless,

he maintained close contact with his patrons and in 1429 he and John Stafford, bishop of Bath and Wells were selected to look after the barony of Penkelly and other Welsh properties, which were then disputed (as part of the Bohun inheritance) between the Crown and the Staffords. Aston was soon to regret this appointment, as revenue from that disturbed area proved difficult to collect. In 1436 the sheriff of Staffordshire was ordered to seize Aston's manors of Haywood and Lee (which was done) until the revenue could be recouped.²⁵ Not surprisingly, Aston and the Bishop relieved themselves of their posts as quickly as possible, and on 14 February 1437 Aston took out a release from all public office which, although stressing his old age and infirmity, could hardly have been unconnected with the Penkelly episode. Since he was only in his early fifties at this time, the release would have been the result of a 'diplomatic' old age and infirmity- common practice at the time when one wished to avoid unwanted public appointments. In fact, Aston continued to be appointed regularly to Staffordshire commissions after 1437, though his name is only very rarely to be found endorsed on the returns made by justices of the peace to the court of King's Bench- indicating that he was not very active in that capacity.

The bulk of the work on the commissions of the peace was shared out between the Stafford family placemen. Aston's replacement, Sir Sampson Meverell, was a talented, if short-tempered old soldier. He lacked a direct

link with Buckingham, but was associated with other (clerical) Staffords- Edmund, bishop of Exeter and John, archbishop of Canterbury- and with the powerful Vernon family in Derbyshire, upon whom the Duke relied heavily.

It is now to the clique which dominated county commissions during this period that attention must be turned. Although their talents and interests complemented each other, they were not a closely-knit group and did not even serve only one master. Their careers bear examining in some detail as firstly, men of their ilk would have been familiar figures in local government throughout the realm, and secondly, they exemplify the kind of men with whom Buckingham liked to work. They were men of experience and proven ability, some of whom had risen through the Stafford family's household or estate ranks. They also tended to be of little significance socially in themselves, thus, in theory, increasing their reliance on the Duke's good lordship. They came from the ranks of the lesser gentry, being employed and retained for their administrative or legal skills rather than as part of the ducal military affinity.

The greater a person's influence with the powerful, the more his advice, services or goodwill was sought by others.

men such as John Harper of Rushall-by-Walsall with access to and influence with Buckingham found fees and favours directed towards them. Harper was a leading member of the Stafford clique in county commissions and one of the Duke's inner circle of retained councillors. He had previously served Buckingham's mother and was to do likewise for his patron's grandson and heir, Duke Henry. His fees totalled £19 a year. This was not a spectacularly large sum, but made a sizeable

contribution to his annual income. The largest single fee was of ten marks from Buckingham. This was not awarded until comparatively late in Harper's career, in 1441. In addition he received £5 'for his counsel' from Robert Corbet.²⁶ Five marks came from William Mitton, an important gentleman from eastern Staffordshire and Shropshire (M.P. for Staffordshire in 1447 and sheriff 1442-3 and 1457-8), who nevertheless thought it expedient to curry favour with a social inferior so close to the Staffords. Harper also received a lesser fee from the first Earl of Shrewsbury, whom he served as auditor of Sheffield.²⁷ In addition, he was steward of Dudley for John, Lord Dudley and of Weston-on-Trent (Derbyshire) for the wealthy Abbot of Chester. These stewardships at least were sinecures, for he had little time to spare for them given his offices on the Stafford family's Midland estates and the county bench, on which he was prominent, judging from the plea rolls and endorsements on criminal indictments. Harper, like most of the Duke's senior administrators, was not a man of great note in his own right, though it would be churlish to attribute all this patronage to his position and none to his personal qualities upon which that position had been built. He had emerged from the ranks of the lesser gentry through competence and trustworthiness in the service of a magnate and now reaped the recognized rewards. Although thrice escheator of Staffordshire (1428-30, 1432-3 and 1439-40), this lack of a substantial and independent standing within county society goes far to explain why he was never appointed sheriff.

Of the dominant quintet Harper was the only one who had been a regular appointee to county commissions before the time this survey opens. Arblaster, Hampton and Whitgreve were first appointed to the Staffordshire bench on 21 February 1439, with Cumberford appearing in 1442. This is not to say that until then they were of little consequence, quite the contrary was true, but it is significant that this takeover coincided with a period of Beauchamp and Ferrers weakness. Ferrers power had been neutralised for a time by the marriage of the dowager Lady Ferrers to Sir Philip Chetwynd and Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick was in France where he died a few months later.

For the likes of the wily Robert Whitgreve, a man old enough to be Buckingham's father, it is difficult to accept that success was due to Stafford patronage or influence. He sat in most of the parliaments from 1411 to 1450, was a royal serjeant from 1423 and teller of the exchequer for twenty-two years from 1428. In 1422 he had been entrusted with the job of conveying a huge sum of Duchy money to Henry V in France, and in 1433 with Buckingham (then just the Earl of Stafford), Harper and William Munden he was set in charge of the chronic financial disaster that was Burton Abbey.²⁸ In short, his talents had been recognized and used long before Stafford was a power in the land. However, this is not to decry the work he did for Buckingham or the mutual benefit derived therefrom. For example, Whitgreve was well placed within the exchequer to watch over Buckingham's financial affairs and supervise his petitions to parliament.²⁹

Whitgreve's Westminster contacts were especially useful when the Duke's legal affairs needed attention. In 1438 he and Nicholas Pointz wrote that 'sithen we wrytten last to your L. your matter of Holderness hath bene full busyllye labourus (sic) before my lord the Chauncelor and other Lordes of the counsaill.'³⁰ This matter concerned part of the Bohun inheritance, the division of which had been the subject of much vacillation and procrastination on the part of the Crown. Much of the labouring was left to the Staffords' experts in Westminster of whom Whitgreve was a leading figure. Apart from the normal fees of office, Whitgreve is known to have received annuities of ten marks from Buckingham's estates in south Wales, and of forty shillings from Sir Philip Chetwynd (for whom he and John Hampton also served as feoffees), and also royal grants of £20 in 1440 probably as joint-steward of Newcastle-under-Lyme, and of £10 a year for services rendered at the exchequer.³¹

John Hampton of Stourton made without doubt the most successful and lucrative move to London of any Staffordshire gentleman in this age. He is a prime example of the kind of courtier villified by contemporaries for bleeding the Crown financially white under the weak-willed Henry VI. There is insufficient space here to record all the grants made to him of money, favours and appointments, but by the time of the 1450 Act of Resumption Hampton was in receipt of over £250 a year from royal grants, exclusive of the profits of office and three wardships. His offices included those of constable of Chester 1436-7 and of Colchester 1447-72, rider of Were (Shropshire) and steward of Morfe, Shirlet, Bromsgrove, King's Norton and Bewdley

just over the county border in Worcestershire. In addition he was a household officer and esquire of the body 1437-61. His Crown and Stafford contacts, together with the plethora of offices on the south Staffordshire-north Worcestershire border (he was also ranger of Kinver forest) made him easily the most important gentleman of that area. On such men Mr. David Morgan has commented:

'They wore the king's liveries of cloth of collar; they pocketed his fees and wages and rewards and gifts; they divided their time between his court and their own counties in a seasonal interchange which was not their least important feature. As individuals they would accumulate a further increment of involvement in central and local patronage and services.'³²

Hampton must have been a man of extraordinary ability, for despite all his commitment at court and in other offices (for many of which he would have had deputies), he still played an active part in Staffordshire local government. He represented the county in parliament seven times, was a regular appointee to all manner of commissions in the county, and with Harper and Cumberford was one of the most diligent figures on the bench. He maintained close links with the Staffords by whom he was retained. The rise in his annuity between 1441 and 1445 from ten marks to £10 is indication of his value to that family. He has been described as more of a Lancastrian partisan than a Staffordshire official, though this misrepresents him. There is little evidence to connect him with other noblemen. His loyalty to Buckingham and Henry VI was less partisanship than pragmatism. By serving them to the best of his ability and for most of his time, he was protecting his own position and acquisitions. However, his connections with the Lancastrian court made it difficult for him to

adapt to Yorkist rule and unlike Harper he was removed from county commissions.

Men like Hampton formed a vital link between court and country, despite many of his posts being sinecures. He certainly never travelled to distant Plymouth to take up his responsibilities as water-bailiff there, though he was quick enough to sue the burgesses there when his wages were in arrears in 1450.³³ Hopeful recipients of patronage had to turn to those well-placed around the throne rather than to the King himself if their petitions were to be successful. Hampton was a personal servant of Henry VI³⁴, and thus had that most vital of all political commodities at the time- access to the royal ear and, while at home, to Buckingham's as well. This not only proved lucrative to himself, but also enabled him to channel patronage to others. He was able to put in a sufficiently good word for his brother Bevis that that man secured a grant of the constableness of Shrewsbury in 1436 while four years later they shared a royal annuity of £8 from Wrockwardine (Shropshire).³⁵ The connection of Thomas Everdon of Bushbury with the Hamptons was doubtlessly the key factor in Everdon's being chosen as the Duchy nominee for Newcastle-under-Lyme in the first parliament of 1449 and as Buckingham's reinforcement for the Staffordshire bench in January 1456. Generally, however, the link between the royal household and Staffordshire was remarkably weak given the position of Buckingham and the large amounts of Crown land within the county. Only a few local men found positions with the king and, compared to Warwickshire at the time³⁶, little in the way of patronage went to courtiers lacking connections with the county.

The careers of the other two members of the quintet, Thomas Arblaster and William Cumberford, must be

dealt with briefly. If Whitgreve was the financial expert, Hampton the link with the court and Harper the estate and judicial dogsbody, Cumberford was the legal expert and Arblaster the all-rounder. Like Hampton's friend Thomas Everdon a few years later, Cumberford was a Duchy lawyer taken up by the Staffords to whose attention he may well have come during a brief period of rapprochement between them and the Ferrers of Chartley, with whom he had connections. Like the others he cultivated ties with other lords, and was an executor for the first Earl of Shrewsbury (whom Harper also served), siding with the second Earl (a friend of Buckingham) in his struggle with the Lisle branch of the Talbot family over the division of his father's inheritance. Cumberford was retained as a lawyer by Stafford in 1442 and soon was put to work helping to sort out his dispute with Sir Thomas Stanley over the manor of Bosley (Cheshire).³⁷ His links with the Duchy grew when in 1446 he was made an attorney for it in the court of common pleas. Soon afterwards either Duchy or Stafford patronage obtained for him the office of second protonotary of the court of Common Pleas.

Arblaster, on the other hand, was the one whose activities were most restricted to Staffordshire. He was brought up on the property of the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, and his father worked for both the bishop and Earl Humphrey. The young Thomas learned his skills as a clerk in one or both of their households. He inherited his father's post as the bishop's parker of Beaudesert. The Staffords, once his ability had been recognized, used him in Staffordshire, Warwickshire and south Wales. He was their receiver for Warwickshire 1438-51 and spent a brief time at Calais in the mid-1430s.³⁸ Though less prominent than some of his colleagues, his value to the Staffords as an administrator can be gauged from his receipt of one of their largest annuities, twenty marks, and by his many elections to parliament.

With many servants and associates installed in high

local offices, little of note was allowed to go on without Buckingham's knowledge. When Henry, duke of Warwick died in 1446 the inquisition post mortem proceedings were held in Lichfield under the watchful eyes of Arblaster and Humphrey Cotes and an imposing retinue of twenty-four. This overt demonstration of expertise and force, so beloved and expected of a magnate, was carefully stage-managed to impress, attract and control. After the inquisition had been concluded to the Duke's satisfaction, he expressed his appreciation to the presiding official, the under-sheriff Nicholas Leveson (himself escheator 1443-4 and 1453-4), by a payment of twenty-three shillings 'pro diligento labore suo.'³⁹

An established way of assisting one's friends and followers was by the use of power, whether temporary or permanent, to secure favourable outcomes for them in their enterprises and legal battles. Buckingham's support for William Mountfort's attempt to disinherit his eldest son Baldwin in favour of a son from a second marriage (a decision determined by the Duke's need for William's support in north Warwickshire against the growing Neville threat to his supremacy there), led to his rigging of both a commission of inquiry into the matter and common law processes. For example in June 1452 a jury returned that Baldwin's son Simon and one Rhys Griffith of Wichnor had seized land and rents in Bescot and Aldridge from William Mountfort.⁴⁰ The jury, however, just happened to be packed with Buckingham's own tenants and a couple of the county coroners. The Duke's assistance was also sought by William Mitton in 1442, after some minor relatives, John Gamell and Alison Mitton, had tried to deprive William of part of his inheritance by forging a testament. In grandious language designed to emphasis his role as a purveyor of Divine justice, Buckingham proclaimed how, once taken to his castle at Stafford for examination, the couple had confessed their crime.⁴¹ How much persuasion

was needed and of what sort this was is not recorded. It seems clear that having made a decisive and successful intervention, the Duke intended to milk the affair for its full propaganda value.

The importance of family connections was as evident in the legal machinations as it was over appointments. For instance, in 1452 Richard Bagot of Blithbury illegally seized cattle belonging to a gentry neighbour, Humphrey Walker of Casterne, and managed to avoid a writ of 'replevin' (ordering the sheriff to secure the return of the beasts) because the sheriff in question was his old friend Robert Aston.⁴² The writ went unheeded for at least another year after that because Bagot himself succeeded Aston as sheriff.

The right connections could accelerate as well as impede or pervert the course of justice. For example, John Harper became involved in a lawsuit in 1444 when some of his tenants at Houndhill and Hanbury had been punished by Duchy of Lancaster officers 'by fine, ransome and imprisonments of their bodies, like as they had trespassed' when all they had done had been to shoo away some deer that had strayed from Needwood chase.⁴³ Harper's Duchy of Lancaster and Stafford associations ensured a speedy investigation of the matter, and in December of that year a 'friendly' commission consisting of Sir Thomas Blount, Sir John Griffith and Robert Whitgreve settled the matter in Harper's favour in under six weeks. Here Harper should be seen as protecting the interests of and providing a humble form of good lordship for those who looked to him- which good lordship in turn stemmed directly from his own patron and good lord, Humphrey, duke of Buckingham. Buckingham occasionally extended this assistance to the lower classes directly, as in early 1446 when he supplied the deserving poor of Newborough-by-Hanbury with a testimonial

asking those whom they encountered while begging in England and the Welsh marches to provide succour for them.⁴⁴ Whether the wealthy Duke went further and gave them alms himself, as opposed to just this- his blessing- is unknown.

Good lordship could also involve direct interference in the disputes of retainers. In addition to the Mountfort and Humphreston affairs mentioned earlier, the Duke was concerned with two local arbitrations. The first, in 1455, cleared up temporarily a festering quarrel between the Vernon and Gresley families; while the second, four years later, provided only a temporary solution to the more protracted set of squabbles between the Basset and Ieverell families in the Peak District.⁴⁵ Both of these cases are dealt with in the chapter on law, disorder and justice. By 1459 Buckingham's desire to patch up disputes within his affinity took on a hitherto-lacking degree of urgency, as standards began to be raised and civil war loomed on the horizon.

The members of the five-man clique may have been worth their weight in writs, but if political success ultimately needed to be found or consolidated on the battlefield, it was to others that Buckingham needed to turn. There was an inherent weakness in relying upon placemen; such individuals, stripped of their lord's support, had little in the way of influence. If such a term can be used, they were not the 'natural leaders' of county society- an important point since, as Dr. Richmond has indicated:

'In the political conflicts (rather than the local skirmishes) it was a lord's ability to get his 'affinity' to follow him that counted, whether they were his tenants and men whom he had retained or simply his friends and well-wishers....It is clear that he could not command but had to solicit such support.'⁴⁶

In the account rolls of the Stafford family entries concerning letters from Buckingham usually do no more than refer tantalisingly to the recipients as divers knights, esquires and yeomen. However, the account for the year ending Michaelmas 1451 contains two lists in which fifteen such individuals were named.⁴⁷ They read like a roll-call of the major county families: Astley, Aston, Bagot, Basset, Burgh, Cawardyn, Cotes, Curzon, Lane, Longford, Mitton, Lynors, Swynnerton, Warings and Wrottesley. In this case these were the worthies who composed the 'greet felouship' accompanying the Duke as he attended Henry VI at Kenilworth and Coventry in that September⁴⁸ - for which service he was later paid £400 in expenses.⁴⁹ In the 1450s the letters sent out to the gentry by Buckingham were usually instructions to be ready to muster for military rather than ceremonial purposes.⁵⁰ On one occasion in 1455 the Duke even used the recently-retired sheriff, Richard Bagot, to deliver the mail and presumably to use personal persuasion to back up the written message.⁵¹

However, Buckingham proved unable to realise at the muster those military assets he had on paper, discovering to his cost how much his affinity had taken to heart Milton's maxim 'they also serve who only stand and wait', preferring the second half to the first. No Staffordshire gentleman is known to have followed the Duke or Lord Dudley on to the field of battle at Saint Albans in May 1455, though, to be frank, so few of the participants in such affairs are known that we may not have a fair picture of what transpired. Much of our evidence comes from lists of the slain and this county's men may have been more than usually adept at staying alive.

Buckingham may also have alienated some of his supporters by turning a blind eye to the more violent antics of certain gentry families such as the Cockaynes and Vernons, about whom more will be revealed in a later chapter. Among those who gradually became disillusioned was John Gresley the younger, whose dilemma was one familiar to many gentlemen at the time. Gresley came from a leading Staffordshire family with a tradition of loyalty and service to the Staffords. His father had been on Buckingham's council and sheriff 1439-40. Gresley himself was M.P. for the county in 1450 and 1453, escheator in 1450-1 and a Stafford family retainer from 1451-2. His politics were not anti-Stafford, though his terms of office (he was also sheriff of Derbyshire in 1453-4) seem to indicate that he was not looked upon with disfavour by opponents of the court party or those outside the Stafford affinity in the area. If he had enemies it was the Vernon family of Haddon and Harlaston, whom Buckingham had lured from the old Ferrers affinity. There may have been an element of jealousy in this, as the 'newcomers' were greatly favoured by the Duke. Many of the younger sons of Sir Richard Vernon were hotheaded and their involvement in many of the disturbances in the Peak District was notorious. In particular, the Vernons led the opposition to the other leading gentry family of the Staffordshire-Derbyshire border area, the Blounts, with whom the Gresleys also had close ties.⁵²

Sir Thomas Blount had been Buckingham's deputy-steward of the Honour of Tutbury, though the Duke's need to maintain the Vernons' support and that of John Cockayne in north Warwickshire led him to turn a blind eye to their nefarious activities, which culminated in a full-scale attack upon the Blounts' principal residences in Derby and

Elvaston. These miscreants could not be brought to justice while they enjoyed Buckingham's protection⁵³, and Walter Blount, who succeeded his father in 1456, was therefore almost driven into the arms of Warwick and York by this ill-discipline within the Stafford affinity.

Blount became the first leading gentleman of that area to ally himself with these lords, adding to a support they had acquired already from the Harcourts in eastern Staffordshire and the Wrottesleys and Astleys from the south of the county. Gresley's problem was how to bestride the ever-widening gulf between his lord Buckingham and his kinsman and friend Blount. An analysis of surviving land deeds shows that he tried to keep in touch with both sides.⁵⁴ While his relatives among the Wrottesleys, Astleys, Delves' and of course Blounts threw in their lot with Warwick, Gresley became increasingly circumspect. This all sufficiently worried the Duke for him to have Gresley removed from the Derbyshire bench in November 1458- around the time of the failed assassination attempt on Warwick by Margaret of Anjou's household men. Yet Gresley's loyalty to Henry VI was proven a year later when he was one of the few Staffordshire men to fight in the royal army at the battle of Blore Heath, and soon after that he was appointed to the commission of array in Derbyshire. However, disillusion linked to the assurance of ready acceptance into the favour of the politically disaffected lords, led him to defect to them in 1460, when he became knight of the shire for Derbyshire. Gresley's qualities had gone unencouraged and ill-used. Unlike many, he was prepared to fight for a cause in which he believed or follow a motivating leader, but soon discovered both cause and leader wanting. His dilemma was that of many

gentlemen at the time- loyalty versus dissatisfaction.

What appears clear, and this point will recur through the rest of the chapter, is that the majority of Staffordshire's gentry adopted a policy of masterly inactivity. Neither Buckingham nor Warwick, who had gradually been uniting the disparate elements of the old Beauchamp and Ferrers affinities, taking over the initiative from Buckingham, found it easy to raise forces in the county. The gentry suppressed latent Lancastrian sympathies and ignored all entreaties or contractual obligations to follow their patrons into action. They were unwilling to fight in their own county and certainly had no intention of doing so elsewhere. This point must, of course, be slightly modified with respect to such committed Yorkists as the Blounts and Wrottesleys, who had risked all in rebellion.

Staffordshire's only battle in the Wars of the Roses was fought at Blore Heath on the afternoon of Sunday 23 September 1459, though most of the combatants were from out-of-county. Nevertheless, the affair deserves some examination in this thesis. It was the opening round of the 1459-61 phase of hostilities and dynastic struggles. That it was so sketchily reported at the time may well indicate that even for contemporary annalists accurate details were hard to come by. Certainly later scholars have thus been left ample scope for speculation and rarely agree about the course of events. There have been three modern studies: a largely inaccurate paper given to an archaeological society in 1850 by W. Beamont; a mainly irrelevant monologue by F.R. Twemlow; and a scholarly reappraisal by an old soldier, A.H. Burne.⁵⁵

To attempt to precis the complex history of English politics through the 1450s is to court disaster, but a resumé of sorts is essential for Blore Heath to be properly understood. Both the court party led by the French-born queen, Margaret of Anjou and the rival York-Neville faction harboured personal grudges and a loathing rivalry which made political compromise or some system of powersharing almost impossible. Each side knew the other to be strong enough to prevent it from acquiring any lasting, peaceful domination of government, but neither could feel secure without this. From 1456 to 1458 the court party had been recovering the ground and offices lost after the fiasco of the battle of Saint Albans in May 1455 and during the two terms when Richard, duke of York acted as Protector (March 1454 to February 1455 and November 1455 to February 1456). Mutual trust did not exist as each sought to exclude the other from power, canvassing Scottish and continental rulers for support. By mid-1458 the court party's recovery had left it capable, nay on the point of crushing all opposition. Despite the ostentatious bon homie of the Love-day of 25 March 1458, few doubted that conflict was but a short time away. In the November of that year Richard, earl of Warwick (who, as captain of Calais, was one of the few Yorkist- meaning supporters of York- leaders still holding a major office) only narrowly escaped assassination by gentlemen and servants of the royal household. Later the Queen tried more ethical though equally unsuccessful means of removing him from the captaincy. As political tension grew in the spring and early summer of 1459, the main protagonists retired to their own areas of strength to marshall support- York in the Welsh marches; Warwick at Calais; Warwick's father Richard, earl of Salisbury in northern Yorkshire at Middleham castle; Henry VI

flitting between Westminster and Coventry; and Margaret of Anjou traversing Lancashire and Cheshire distributing 'a lyuery of Swannys to alle the gentilmenne of the contre.'⁵⁶

Salisbury's march from Middleham was the first half of the Yorkist plan to unite; Warwick was then to cross from Calais and the three of them aimed to discuss the present situation and their future strategy at York's castle at Ludlow. The battle of Blore Heath occurred while Salisbury was en route for Ludlow. How much the Earl brought the ~~conflict~~ upon himself is a matter of opinion. What was safety in numbers to one man could be construed as a council of war by another. Certainly Salisbury's retinue could hardly be passed off as a protective detachment. Back in 1452 at Blackheath and in 1455 at Saint Albans York and his allies had insisted that their mobilisations were not treasonable gatherings, but were the only way they could obtain a fair hearing from their liege lord. In 1459, with Henry VI already collecting an army, the Yorkists wanted both a clarification of his intentions towards them and an explanation of his actions and those of the Queen and her allies.⁵⁷ Thus Salisbury's journey south should not be regarded as the first evidence of mobilisation. Margaret of Anjou's peregrination, which had taken her to Chester and then to the Bishop of Coventry & Lichfield's palace at Eccleshall, was scarcely an innocent progress through a distant portion of the realm. She too was amassing support for an imminent campaign. In this she was accompanied by two minor Staffordshire noblemen, John, Lord Dudley and James, Lord Audley, both of whom were experienced soldiers. Significantly, Buckingham and Shrewsbury, whose influence in the north Midlands far surpassed that of Dudley and Audley, were conspicuously absent from this recruitment tour. They spent some time with the King and some around the estates of the Honour of Tutbury, presumably discussing the

worsening situation. Like the majority of the nobility at this time, although they were certain to side with the King in any military showdown, they distanced themselves from the extremism of the faction centred around the Queen and her favourite, the Earl of Wiltshire. It was partly this absence and partly because the recruitment took place mainly around rather than inside Staffordshire that that county sent so few troops to the battle.

Audley, although no longer regularly resident in this area, nevertheless counted upon his numerous tenants and gentry associates to turn out and fight for him. The royalist army did eventually contain some Staffordshire levies brought by the sheriff and also several groups led by Dudley, which included a couple of members of the wealthy Wolverhampton burgess family the Levesons. In general though, this was a battle fought between Yorkshiremen and Cheshiremen; certainly the lists of the slain contain no notable Staffordshire names.

Henry VI spent most of the early summer at Coventry where he held a session of the Great Council, from which the Yorkist leadership was absent. In August he was back at Westminster and its environs, moving off to Winchester at the end of the month. Besides the need to muster support, this move was precipitated by the increasing hostility of the Londoners to the court party and by the need to be strategically placed should Warwick make any move from Calais. Around 9 September news of Salisbury's departure from Middleham reached the King who, after ascertaining that Warwick was still safely on the other side of the Channel, ordered his own army to trek north. Henry's route probably passed through Oxford, Banbury and Coventry as he collected around his banner troops for the impending confrontation. He certainly reached as far north as Nottingham. There he sent to Thomas, Lord Stanley for support. However, this request ruined any chance there might have been for a surprise royalist attack;

for Stanley, while uttering hospitable and encouraging noises to his monarch, secretly dispatched his brother William to warn the Earl of the approaching danger.⁵⁸

Stanley's deceit was such that when he wrote to the Queen, presumably after she too had summoned his support, he even offered to take on Salisbury's army on his own, without waiting for supporting royalist forces to arrive.



MAP OF STAFFORDSHIRE SHOWING LOCATIONS MENTIONED IN THIS SECTION

His actions were far more than an attempt to avoid having to commit himself to one or other of the sides; he had decided whom to support some time earlier, having left instructions that none of his tenants should join the royal armies.⁵⁹ He was, however, anxious not to give away his intentions at this stage and also had something in common with those who in previous years had sought a solution to the factional disputes by negotiation. In a letter to Salisbury after the battle Stanley was at pains to stress that had he reached Henry, he would have used all his power to secure for the Earl an audience with the King. This Yorkist aim to by-pass their enemies and put their case directly to Henry VI had headed their demands in 1455 when it had needed a battle to secure this. However, given Stanley's general record, it is difficult to believe that this, albeit genuine desire to gain for Salisbury access to the King, would have resulted in any but the most tentative action

Audley must have been fairly confident of successfully preventing Salisbury from uniting with York at Ludlow. The exact size of the armies is unknown, but it seems safe to say that the Yorkists were outnumbered by about three-to-one.⁶⁰ The Earl also had to pass through 'hostile' territory before reaching his destination. Audley who had been given command of the Queen's forces spent much of September and possibly some time earlier gathering his forces, using his castle at Heighley (about three miles west of Newcastle-under-Lyme) as his centre of operations and making frequent trips to report his progress to Margaret of Anjou. He knew the movements of Salisbury's army and was thus able to shadow its progress, waiting his moment, before swinging round in front of them to block the way south at Market Drayton. The Earl knew that a large royalist army was being assembled on the Cheshire-Staffordshire border and that an even larger one under

the King himself was somewhere in the north Midlands. His march, therefore had to be hurried, but with constant vigilance in case of a sudden attack. The Earl would also have evaluated the countryside through which he was passing, in case a defensible site should be required at short notice. Blore village, three miles from Market Drayton and just off the main road from Newcastle, was hardly an ideal site for a battle from the point of view of either an attacker or a defender, simply the best that could be found at the time.

Which side arrived at Blore Heath first? Burne implies that it was Audley and that Salisbury's men, emerging from the woods surrounding the road, had to draw up their battle line hurriedly on seeing the royalist forces- or at least the pennant tips of their cavalry- half a mile in the distance.⁶¹ This is unconvincing, as by any military appraisal Audley's men, though more numerous, were in the worse tactical position. Unless we assume a generosity on their commander's part which is unwarranted by the evidence, it is hard to credit that Audley would hand his enemy the significantly better ground on which to fight. Burne's information came from the description of the battle given by the Burgundian chronicler Jean de Waurin, but that account (as shall be shown) should be treated cautiously. It seems more likely that while en route from Newcastle Salisbury was informed by his scouts of Audley's position outside Market Drayton and that the Earl consequently encamped within the relative safety of Rowney Wood on the night before the battle. Meanwhile he was planning his battle tactics and formation for the following day. Audley's advance on the morning of 23 September took him along the road from Market Drayton and, should Waurin's report about the tips of the Lancastrian pennants being visible to the Yorkists as the latter emerged from the woods be more than fictional embroidery, it is surely a reference to the Lancastrians

approaching rather than lying in wait.

The only detailed account of the battle itself is given by Jean de Waurin.⁶² However, every aspect of this which can be independently checked has proved to be grossly inaccurate, not that this has deterred later historians from accepting it unhesitatingly. The errors in such basics as the battle's date implied as 25 or 26 September 1457), or its location (said to be on the Derbyshire-Yorkshire border), or its participants (the royalist commanders were supposedly the Lords Wells and Beaumont and the Duke of Exeter⁶³, while Warwick was also included among the Yorkist forces), hardly inspire confidence in his ability to record accurately the tactical minutiae. To be charitable, Waurin may well provide his readers with a set of accurate basic facts, but it is difficult to mine these jewels from the concomitant dross of exaggeration, error and invention. Some of this was artistic licence on Waurin's part, based upon his knowledge of contemporary military procedure, but most stemmed from his garbled amalgam of the old soldiers' tales which were his principal source.

According to Waurin, the armies drew up on either side of Wemberton brook. The Yorkists constructed a bastion with their wagons and horses, protected by a line of stakes. This was to provide them with a solid corner to their right wing. Salisbury then feigned a retreat to entice his opponents across the brook. Audley supposedly fell into this trap and ordered his men to attack while archers gave what covering fire they could from the flanks. Two successive cavalry attacks across the brook were made, during the second of which Audley himself was killed. The total royalist losses were put at seven hundred against a mere thirty for the Yorkists. After Audley's death Dudley took command and ordered the survivors to dismount

and engage in hand-to-hand combat. Five hundred of his men then deserted to Salisbury, turning the battle decisively in the Earl's favour. Then Dudley was wounded and captured and the day was lost.

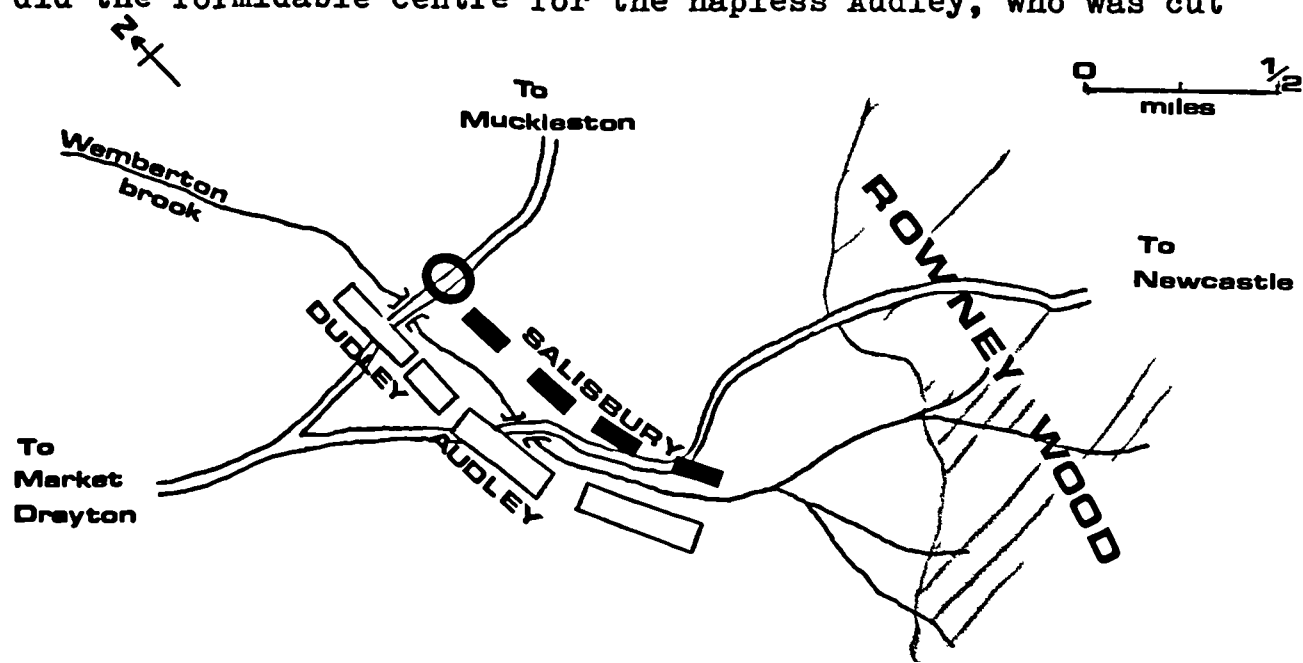
However, even the briefest visit to the battlefield would have shown Waurin that events could not have followed that sequence. Wemberton brook, described as not very broad but somewhat deep, was not the obstacle the Burgundian thought. It is in fact not only very narrow but also only a mere four inches deep. The nature of the terrain is such that the passage of time should deepen rather than fill in the brook, so it may have been even less of a hindrance in 1459 than it appears today. The real difficulty was the steep-sided gully in which the brook lay, which would have provided a serious challenge, especially if bordered by hedging, to a riderless horse, let alone heavy cavalry. In short, no broad cavalry attack could have taken place across the brook.

The main road from Newcastle to Market Drayton, emerging from Rowney Wood, crossed the heath and forded the brook about a thousand yards from Blore village. This ford seems to have been the only one considered by historians in their accounts of the battle, but a mere six hundred yards downstream (i.e. away from Blore) there was another one, across which the road from Market Drayton to Muckleston ran. Advancing from Market Drayton and with a clear view over the heath, this second ford could not have gone unnoticed by the Lancastrian commanders. With the ground noticeably improving and the difficulty of traversing brook and bank diminishing the closer to this Muckleston ford one went, it seems likely that Audley chose to make use of it and Salisbury could hardly risk ignoring it when deciding on his strategy and deploying his forces. Also if there be any truth in the story that Margaret of Anjou

watched the battle from the church tower at Muckleston, this would lend further support to my theory of the use of this ford, across which she would have had to have passed to get there.

Audley's second-in-command, Dudley, was the obvious choice for leader of any left-wing attack across the Muckleston ford. The eye-witnesses who told their tales to Waurin ambiguously mentioned two cavalry attacks. While our Burgundian chronicler described these as coming one after the other, it seems more likely, given the terrain, that there were two separate and simultaneous attacks; with Dudley storming the Muckleston ford and Audley commanding the centre, as was usual for the leader to do, at the Newcastle one.

These attacks may have begun on horseback, but soon the masses of writhing flesh and impeding corpses would have made mounted progress impossible. The decision to dismount, far from indicating a change in command, as even Burne thought⁶⁴, was merely a practical necessity. In my opinion what probably happened was that while the cavalry attempted to storm the fords, it was their infantry who had to fight their way over the brook and up the sides of the gully with covering fire from the archers. Dudley found his task the easier. The static barricade of wagons on the Yorkist right offered greater scope for manoeuvres than did the formidable centre for the hapless Audley, who was cut



down in the area of the thickest fighting. On learning of this, Dudley would have swung round towards the centre to prop this up. However, the loss of the Lancastrian commander had disheartened many and, despite furious hand-to-hand fighting, desertions and defections began. Dudley then became trapped, wounded and captured as his army melted away around him.

After the battle Salisbury did not remain in the area for long. He knew that a far larger royalist army under the King and containing the likes of Buckingham, Shrewsbury and Wiltshire was heading towards him. Having forged an opportunity to reach safety and reinforcements at Ludlow, he was determined to take it. The Earl's victorious army spent the night after the battle outside of Market Drayton and there received a letter of congratulations from the perfidious Stanley, who declared himself to be 'trusting to God that he shuld be with the same Erle in other place, to stond hym in as good stede, as he shuld have doon yef he had been with theym there.'⁶⁵ Salisbury would have done well to have treated this with scepticism rather than rejoicing. Before daybreak on the 24 September Salisbury's forces slipped away, stealing a march on any pursuers. Gregory's chronicle adds a delightful, though probably apocryphal tale that the Earl left behind an Augustinian friar who 'schot gonnys alle that nyght in a parke that was at the backe syde of the fylde' to distract and mislead any approaching royal force into believing the rebels to be static and, like as not, inebriated.⁶⁶

Comparing chronicle references to the battle, varying markedly in length, bias, accuracy and detail as they do, reveals that whatever events may have preceded Blore Heath, it was this conflict (rather than Saint Albans four years earlier) that contemporaries regarded as the final and irreversable entry into civil war. A week has always been a long time in politics and memories in the fifteenth century could be as short-lived as at

any other time. Pro-Lancastrian writers stressed the fact of rebellion against an appointed king, ignoring both the precedent set in 1399 and the events leading to the opening of hostilities. There was a subtle, but noticeable determination to absolve from blame whichever side the chronicler was partial to. It was as if all agreed that whoever could be blamed for Blore Heath could also be held responsible for all the bloody consequences of revolt. Not for contemporaries were the mitigating factors and division of responsibility so beloved of later generations of historians. Medieval chroniclers dealt in those all-embracing, eternal verities which formed an integral part of the spoils of war.

An anti-Yorkist pamphlet, the so-called Somnium Vigilantis, saw Salisbury's march as being provocative rather than defensive and as part of a wider scheme of rebellion initiated while 'the kynge accordyng to his pleasure lay pesable wyse in his castell of Kenelworth withoute suspencion of eny yvel.'⁶⁷ Polydore Vergil, after distinguishing himself by being the only historian then or since to refer to Margaret of Anjou as 'this wise woman', emphasised that 'therle of Salesbury would not omitt the possibilitie of fight offered', and in an oblique reference to Yorkist lack of concern for human life, stressed that the battle was only won after 'great slaughter of both his enemyes and of his own men also.'⁶⁸

Council for the defence, while maintaining the traditional practice of attacking evil advisors rather than the King himself, aimed at placing these events in context; believing that, by so doing, the justness of the York-Neville stand would become apparent. They were also trying to counter the bald and partial editing of events which was such a feature of their opponents' propaganda. Yorkist and even some of the Tudor

writings argued that the hostilities had been none of Salisbury's wanting; they were forced on him by the actions of those poisoning the King's mind. Chief among these was the hated Queen who with her advisors had decided that there was 'no boote to make any farther concord or league with hir aduersaries.'⁶⁹ She had lain at Eccleshall and 'anon by hir stiryng the king assembled a grete power.'⁷⁰ Fabyan wrote that she and her council had set out to do away with Salisbury after his son Warwick had slipped out of their hands in the bungled assassination attempt of November 1458, and accordingly they had sent Audley with an army 'forto haue destressed him.'⁷¹ However the Earl had been forewarned and when cornered at Blore Heath 'perceyuing by the liverie of the souldiours that he was circumvented and likely to be trapped wyth the Queenes power, determined rather there to abide the aduenture with fame and honour, then farther to flie, with losse and reproche.'⁷² Whether this was written to stand deliberately in contrast with the recent loss of the French domains is debatable. Certainly the Yorkist chroniclers made much of it being a victory won against overwhelming odds; though the often ludicrous exaggeration of the size and casualties of the armies serves only to detract from rather than enhance the measure of Salisbury's achievement.

Many chronicles, especially the London ones, accepted a current Lancastrian rumour that Salisbury was in fact heading for the capital with his army in a move similar to that of Richard, duke of York in 1452. If this were so, it was a direct challenge to Henry VI. In fact the rumour had been started to stir up support for the King and to discredit his enemies- or to be more accurate, those of the court faction. By this it was also hoped to discredit any Yorkist conciliatory gestures or protestations of loyalty. The rumour was obviously widely

believed for even the pro-Yorkist Brut carries it. When after Blore Heath it became apparent that Salisbury was not going to be making an early appearance in London and that his route had lain towards Shropshire this was explained away by the government as the result of the King's presence on the campaign trail. Henry had supposedly forced a change of plan upon Salisbury who had had 'to diverte from his first enterprise and purpose, and to take another way to assemble with the seid Duc of York and Erle of Warrewyk, that their commyng togider myght make a myghtyer felde.'⁷³

Who really won at Blore Heath ? The day certainly belonged to Salisbury who was thus able to force a way through to his allies at Ludlow, but this was for him and for England a pyrrhic victory. The real triumph lay with the extremists of the court faction who now had the opportunity they had long sought for revenge. The decision to fight had been taken before Salisbury had left Middleham, a fact not unsuspected by him and contributing to his timing of the march south. All that was left to decide was the time and the site of the crucial opening battle; that was to be an afternoon in late autumn 1459 and on the bleak heathland of western Staffordshire.

Salisbury's jubilation was to be short-lived. Henry VI just before the battle had moved to Kenilworth (a few miles south-west of Coventry) and was moving westwards to link up forces with his Queen and Audley. On the day of the battle of Blore Heath the King had reached Coleshill, the principal residence of Margaret of Anjou's favourite Edmund Mountfort, from where he passed into south Staffordshire. He was at Walsall on 25 September and Wolverhampton on 26 September. Then, joining with the remnants of Audley's army, Henry turned south to Worcester and Leominster in early October, before reaching York's castle at

Ludlow. As for the other battles in this phase of the war, Staffordshire men were again rarely in action. After Blore Heath Henry VI confronted the by-now united Yorkist leadership outside Ludlow on 12 October. Buckingham and Shrewsbury were among the royal retinue at that point, and opposing them were such familiar names as Walter Blount, Humphrey Blount of Kinlet and Fulk Stafford of Harvington-by-Kidderminster (just over the border in Worcestershire). All were close associates of Richard, earl of Warwick. Stafford, though of Herefordshire stock, was the Earl's appointee as sheriff of Worcestershire 1455-7. After the Yorkist army had dispersed, refusing to fight the King at that time, these supporters fled with their leaders to Warwick's stronghold at Calais to await another chance for pressing their claims.

By mid-1460 that opportunity had presented itself and on 10 July a royal army which had spent the previous couple of months at Coventry and then Northampton met at the latter venue the forces of Warwick, Norfolk and the young Edward, earl of March. Walter Blount was predictably near his master and the Yorkists were further strengthened by the presence of the son of the slain Lancastrian commander at Blore Heath, John, Lord Audley- though I doubt whether he had the opportunity to recruit any of his north Midland tenants to fight alongside him. The battle has traditionally been seen as a disaster for Henry VI and a watershed in the fortunes of his house. Certainly the Lancastrians could ill-afford the loss of both Buckingham and Shrewsbury, who fell defending the royal tent. However, it is with the history of Staffordshire rather than national politics that this thesis is concerned, so how much of a calamity these deaths were for the King need not detain us here. The effect on Staffordshire on the other hand does need discussion.

Had Buckingham survived, it is probable that he would have greatly increased his efforts to induce the gentry of Staffordshire to follow him and made the penalties for not doing so really tell. As it was, with the tide of the war turning towards Warwick and York and the knowledge that the Staffords faced a lengthy minority, there was little to commend military adventure and much to say for circumspection. The burgesses of Tamworth took the precaution in 1460 of ordering that no-one should carry a lance, hauberk or dart within the town boundary.⁷⁴ People just did not want to get involved. The only Staffordshire man known to have fought at the battle of Wakefield on the last day of 1460, at which the Lancastrians regained the military initiative and killed York and Salisbury was Sir Thomas Ferrers of Tamworth- and he was on the losing side.

No-one from Staffordshire supported Henry VI in February 1461 at the second battle of Saint Albans save the adolescent third Earl of Shrewsbury. Only John, Lord Audley was at Mortimer's Cross a week later and he was by then a committed Yorkist, though by Palm Sunday (29 March), after Edward, earl of March had proclaimed himself king, a remnant of committed Lancastrians with Staffordshire connections did join the fray at Towton. Shrewsbury was there again, as were the Earl of Wiltshire and Buckingham's younger son, Henry. Among the gentry were numbered Edmund Mountfort and Humphrey Whitgreve. Walter Blount, turned out for the rebels, along with the Staffords of Harvington-by-Kidderminster (in north Worcestershire) and 'Lord' John Stanley of Elford (as one Venetian mistakenly described him⁷⁵). During the course of that bloody day John Stafford of Harvington and James, earl of Wiltshire were killed. Wiltshire's Staffordshire lands were

later granted to the surviving Stafford of Harvington brother.⁷⁶

With this battle the factional struggles that had dogged England were temporarily ended. By 1461 fewer people than ever were prepared to fight for the court faction, and in Staffordshire Humphrey Whitgreve (Robert's eldest son) was very much the exception when, after fleeing from the battlefield of Towton, he chose to follow Margaret of Anjou into exile in Scotland.⁷⁷ Even he, however, soon made his peace with Edward IV and returned to his estates. On a lighter note, there is unfortunately no evidence that Isabel Ramsor, who was fined six shillings and eightpence in May 1462 by the authorities at Tamworth for harbouring 'suspicious men' at night, was uniting the espionage propensity of her Biblical counterpart Rahab with their profession's more regular nocturnal activities.⁷⁸ Certainly there was no mention of Staffordshire men being involved in the brief north-west Midlands uprising around Lancashire and Cheshire early in 1464, which reputedly involved upto ten thousand men.⁷⁹

Gentry immobility had been due less to cowardice or even apathy than to a confident assumption of immunity from reprisal. Bastard feudalism was above all a voluntary business relationship with patronage and service as unenforcible contractual obligations. Medieval leaders had perennially suffered from the perfidy of those upon whom they had to rely, and Buckingham had been no exception. Men could only be 'forced' to fight by a lord either collecting them personally (as Henry Tudor can be said to have done as he passed through the county en route for Bosworth) or by so linking their fates to his own that self-interest demanded a positive response. Buckingham did neither, and this failure contributed to his death at the battle of Northampton. Nevertheless, the power he exercised during his life was an ever-present feature of county life. The family's

influence built up over generations, fostered by sizeable estates within the area and aided by the later marriage of Buckingham's widow to his former enemy Sir Walter Blount in 1467, survived two lengthy minorities in the second half of the century. However, it was never again to reach the heights of the 1440s and 1450s when Staffordshire really was Stafford's shire.

The 1460s

The replacement of personnel within government, so characteristic of political change, was neither as sudden nor as all-embracing in Staffordshire as it was in other, more important or sensitive parts of the realm. This can be seen particularly clearly in the commissions of the peace. The one issued in March 1461, following Edward IV's accession, illustrates this transitional rather than revolutionary nature of the hand-over of power.

Among the nobility of the county some had made their peace with the new regime. Dudley and John, Lord Audley readjusted their allegiance following their capture at Blore Heath and Calais respectively. Walter Devereux was raised to the peerage in recognition of his support of York and adopted the hereditary title of his wife's family, becoming Lord Ferrers of Chartley. However, he continued to take as little interest in the affairs of Staffordshire as he had under Henry VI. On the clerical side, Bishop Halse of Coventry and Lichfield needed to keep his nose clean. He owed his appointment to the support of Margaret of Anjou, one of whose chaplains he had been, and whose escape from Blore Heath he had manufactured. Nevertheless, both he and Dudley were appointed to this initial commission.

Of the Henrician gentry justices of the peace, those who possessed strong Duchy of Lancaster connections (Harper,

Cumberford and for a while Everdon) were kept on by Edward IV, once they had presumably indicated their willingness to serve him with the diligence and loyalty that they had shown his predecessor. After 1461 Harper quickly adapted to his new masters. He was unconcerned to some extent with who his employers were, as his career was built not upon political favouritism but on a talented reliability. While the 'Parliament of Devils' was attainting York and Warwick in December 1459, Harper was busy securing for himself the post of auditor of the latter's estates; the stewardship and receivership of which went to the Queen's favourite Sir Edmund Mountfort of Coleshill.⁸⁰ This notwithstanding, he did not make the enemies that such courtiers as his friend John Hampton had. It is likely that Hampton was one of the Staffordshire knights of the shire elected to that parliament.

Since the success of the Yorkist brave new world was largely dependent on the efficient administration and control of the localities, they were on the lookout for able gentlemen who were prepared to accept office. Initially at least, these were not easy to find. Harper was particularly welcomed in Staffordshire because few were prepared to risk coming out for the faction which had just deposed an anointed king and slain Buckingham and Shrewsbury, especially given that the Yorkists were by no means secure in power. Harper was soon put to work. On 1 January 1462 he became auditor of the Shropshire estates of the infant Duke of Norfolk, having previously (three days before Christmas) joined William Harcourt in heading a commission to arrest Humphrey Swynnerton for spreading anti-government rumours. His appointment as Norfolk's

auditor accompanied a confirmation of his being kept on as the Stafford family's auditor in south Wales and Cheshire. When he died at Michaelmas 1464 he was a trusted official of Edward IV's. In fact in the Act of Resumption that year annuities to him and his son were exempted.

Cumberford continued as protonotary in Common Pleas. There was little reason why he should have lost this post. He had taken no interest in politics, concentrating upon building a career through quiet efficiency rather than a search for lucrative patrons. Not that he lacked influential contacts. He had close ties with his neighbours the Stanleys of Elford, for whom he had arbitrated with his friend Thomas Littleton back in 1455⁸¹, and with the Vernons. He was a feoffee and an executor for Sir William Vernon.⁸² A talented lawyer was always in demand. After the death of Humphrey, duke of Buckingham in 1460 the widowed Duchess Anne, no doubt anxious for the future, immediately raised his annuity from £2 to £10. In the uncertain days to come she must have felt that his counsel and services would prove invaluable and wanted to ensure that she secured them. Cumberford was briefly her steward in Staffordshire and in an account for 1462-3 he and the receiver for that county, John Burton, received fifty-eight shillings and twopence in travelling expenses after riding around 'diverse lordshippes and manors of my ladies in the countees of Stafford, Salop and Chester...to purvey and ordeyn for the good governaunce of the same for my ladies moste a vayne.'⁸³ Thus, like Harper, Cumberford maintained his contacts and employment with the Stafford family. His career in the 1460s continued quietly, but satisfactorily. By May 1465 he was able to join with a few professional associates

in paying a thousand marks in cash for the keeping of the property of a certain Richard Charlton of Middlesex during his minority.⁸⁴

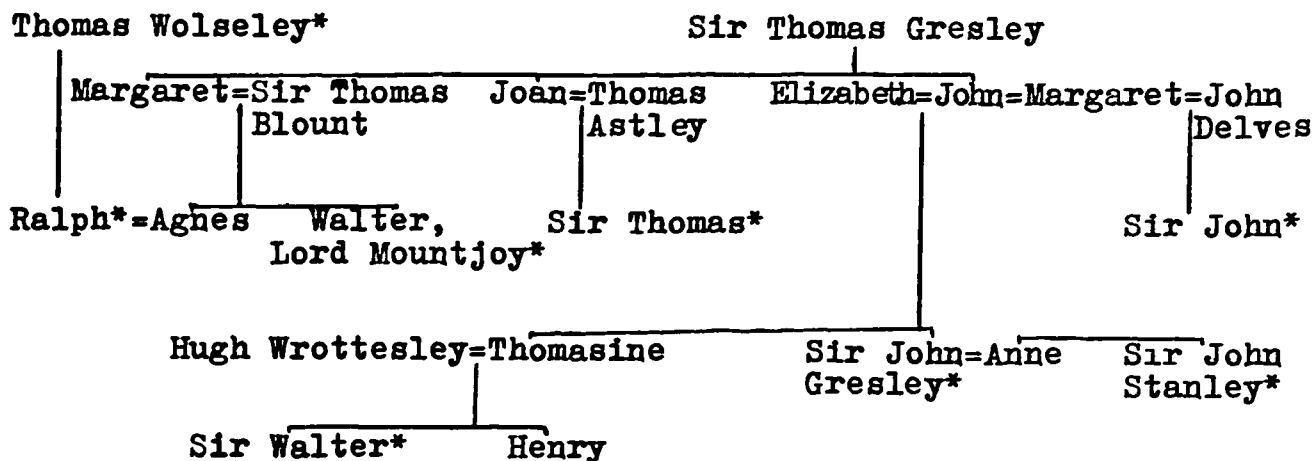
In the Yorkist commissions of the peace the emphasis lay, as in the previous two decades, on ability (especially in legal matters) and political acceptability among the gentry appointees, while as usual all the important adult local noblemen were also found places. Warwick, Audley, Dudley, and the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield featured in all the commissions of the 1460s. The third Earl of Shrewsbury and George, duke of Clarence joined the others on the bench when they reached their late teens, in 1467 and 1468 respectively, Henry, Lord Grey of Codnor was the only other noble appointee, entering the scene in 1468.

Apart from John Hampton's kinsman Thomas Everdon, no gentleman was removed from the Staffordshire bench until the Readeption, though Sir Walter Wrottesley did miss one commission (1464-5). Cumberford, Delves, Blount, Astley, Wrottesley, Warings and the Wolseleys formed as solid a factional phalanx in the 1460s as had the quintet of Stafford family placemen in the previous two decades. The number of gentry commissioners increased during the 1460s. Legal expertise in the persons of John Wood of Keele and Thomas Littleton arrived in 1465 and 1468. Sir John Stanley of Elford joined in 1463, Sir John Gresley in 1464 and Clarence's right-hand man, Henry Vernon, made a fleeting appearance in 1469-70. These last three came from leading Lancastrian families, though Vernon was too young to have participated in the struggles of the 1450s. The defection of the kinsmen Gresley and Stanley in 1460 was conditioned by disillusion with the cause and chances of success of the court faction and a desire to retain their

positions of prominence within the county. However, if they had also hoped for material gain by defection, they were to be disappointed. Pickings were meagre in Staffordshire, and what there was went to 'Yorkists' of longer standing. That so little property was confiscated and distributed as rewards after 1461- an important factor in explaining the lack of acrimony at the advent of Edward IV- was directly due to the paucity of the county's contribution to either the Lancastrian or Yorkist war efforts. The only estates parcelled out to the victors were James, earl of Wiltshire's manors at Clent, Handsworth and Mere. Even the Staffords' inheritance continued to be administered by the family at an annual farm to the Crown until 1464 when this was waived in return for the wardship and marriage of the young Duke Henry.⁸⁵

The demise of Buckingham left the way open for an aggrandisement of Neville power in the north Midlands. Dr. Carpenter has shown that in Warwickshire the leading office-holders in the 1460s were connected with the Earl of Warwick, who, though they were increasingly being drawn from the top ranks of the county gentry, nevertheless were changed too rapidly for a self-perpetuating clique to emerge.⁸⁶ There was a faint echo of this situation in Staffordshire; however, here cliques had definitely developed. On the whole, the office-holders in Staffordshire in the 1460s and 1470s were of a higher social status than those of the 1440s and 1450s. The idea that the leading gentry families came to expect that they be given a share in the rule of the county, while possessing a certain validity, needs the qualification that this expectation was not born of mere pride or any conscious policy. Rather, it was a regularisation of the extent to which magnate deaths and absenteeism had facilitated and indeed necessitated a tighter, more independent gentry grip upon the reins of local government.

Both the sheriffs and the justices of the peace in the 1460s were remarkably inter-married. Of the dozen new gentlemen appointed to the Staffordshire bench in the 1460s, eight can be placed on a simple genealogy- a feat impossible for other decades in the fifteenth century. The genealogy, shown below, has the names of the commissioners marked with asterisks.



Marriage, like the retaining of bastard feudalism, expressed and, in expressing, revealed and consolidated both the desire for and existence of a discernible and dependable structure within society. In Staffordshire the wedding ring proved a more successful method of ensuring a permanent cleaving-together of both the persons and fates of interested parties (thereby obtaining unity of action and purpose) than did the much-vaunted, though regularly put-asunder indentured contract of retention.

The extended family, with its ready-made lines of communication and bonds of self-interest and/or sympathy, offered a superstructure upon which an enterprising lord might construct an affinity and through which his influence would be expressed. Richard Neville had spent much of the late 1440s and 1450s attempting to do just this in Warwickshire and south Staffordshire. In the latter county his lynch-pin was the

Wrottesley family of Wrottesley (about five miles north-west of Wolverhampton), whom he recruited in the early 1450s.

Although Hugh Wrottesley was the head of the family at this time, it was his sons Walter and Henry who headed this Warwick connection. The brothers were about the same age as the Earl, with whom they soon became close friends. They were largely dependent on Warwick's patronage during their father's lifetime and, as it was to prove, even after Hugh's death in 1464. He had enfeoffed the family's principal manors of Wrottesley and Buttersley jointly upon himself and his wife Thomasine (née Gresley).⁸⁷ She out-lived both her husband and sons, denying the latter most of their inheritance. Thus, their siding with Warwick during the crises of 1459-61 and 1470-1, while due mainly to personal loyalty, was also tinged with a shade of desperate necessity. Walter Wrottesley was soon appointed to Warwick's council and later became his steward and paymaster. In 1457 he took over from Fulk Stafford as under-sheriff of Worcestershire. This was effectively the shrievalty. It was just that Warwick was the permanent sheriff and used the post of under-sheriff as a piece of patronage. Wrottesley served in that position for two years, and his younger brother Henry filled it 1461-2. In the mean time Walter had been appointed to the more taxing (and potentially difficult to control) shrievalty of Staffordshire during the period of Yorkist ascendancy between the battles of Northampton and Wakefield. He was thus sheriff when Edward of March seized the throne in March 1461.

As followers of Warwick and the House of York, the Wrottesley brothers shared in the spoils of victory. Henry was granted £10 worth of property forfeited by Thomas Litley,

a pro-Lancastrian Londoner.⁸⁸ Sir Walter received, after the untimely death of Fulk Stafford, James, earl of Wiltshire's former manors of Clent, Handsworth and Mere, together with other Butler lands in Dorset.⁸⁹ To these were added Perton-by-Wolverhampton and Aven (Glamorgan) in February 1466, possibly gifts from Warwick.⁹⁰ By the late 1460s Sir Walter was the Earl's steward and when Warwick successfully claimed to be an hereditary chamberlain of the Exchequer in 1468, Wrottesley was appointed his deputy.⁹¹ However, whether the Wrottesleys were important figures in local politics or the day-to-day administration of Staffordshire is doubtful. Like their good lord Warwick whose companions they were, the Wrottesleys were absent from the north Midlands too often and for too long to exercise personally much influence.

Warwick's other leading supporters in the area, the Blounts, on the other hand, were more locally based. They were the other Yorkist family in Staffordshire to benefit from royal patronage after 1461. Sir Walter Blount was taken onto Edward IV's council and, like several Yorkist gentlemen, was ultimately ennobled, becoming Lord Mountjoy in 1465.⁹² His brother Thomas was favoured with grants of land and offices in Lincolnshire⁹³ and replaced Sir Walter as Warwick's treasurer of Calais in 1464. The Blounts' local power was boosted through offices in the Duchy of Lancaster's Midland estates. Old Sir Thomas Blount (died 1456), it will be remembered, had been Buckingham's deputy-steward in the Honour of Tutbury. Sir Walter succeeded Warwick as steward of that Honour in 1464, having been appointed to the stewardship of the neighbouring Honour of High Peak three years earlier. Blount's influence reached its zenith with his marriage to the dowager Duchess of Buckingham, which had taken place by 29 March 1466.

All of the escheators and all but one of the sheriffs of Staffordshire in the 1460s were new to these offices. There had thus been a definite change in the personnel from the 1440s and 1450s. Most of the gentry preferred to await a more settled political climate before being prepared to take up a county office under the Yorkists. Initially the onus lay with the few committed supporters of Edward IV to fill the various county posts.

The Yorkist powerbase in Staffordshire was a limited one, dependent on two family clans: one centred on the Wrottesley-Blount axis and the other around the Harcourts. The weakness of this position goes far in explaining the lack of any glut of lawsuits or outbursts of criminal activity against prominent Lancastrians. Only John Hampton, whose connections with the court and in particular Margaret of Anjou were stronger than those of any other local gentleman, suffered- and even he was largely ignored. He accused John Acton of Bewdley (Worcestershire), who had been favoured with the rangership of Kinver which Hampton had previously held, of assaulting him at Stourton.⁹⁴ Acton, who may have married the widow of Robert Grey of Whittington by then and was to become sheriff in 1467-8, had strong Yorkist antecedents and also designs on Hampton's position of preeminence in south-west Staffordshire.

How restricted the Yorkist powerbase was is illustrated by an analysis of the county office-holders in this decade. All but two of the gentry members of the March 1461 commission of array and commission to seize the episcopal castle at Eccleshall and royal castle at Stafford either became sheriff in this decade or were the brothers of such sheriffs. On that

commission of array was a mixture of such familiar names as Sir Walter Blount, Sir John Gresley and the Stanleys of Elford, and previously influential, but politically inexperienced men like Humphrey Peshale of Hopton, William Basset of Blore and Philip Okeover of Okeover. The last two of these were related and represented families from the Staffordshire Peak District who, like the Blounts, had been alienated from the Staffords by the excesses of the wilder elements of Buckingham's affinity and by Duke Humphrey's apparent unwillingness to prevent those antics. Their disaffection is not known to have stirred them into any active participation in the battles of 1459-61, but it was certainly widely enough known about for them to be turned to immediately the Yorkists had seized power.

Humphrey Peshale owed his place on the commissions of the 1460s to his being related to the Egertons of Wrinchill and to his friendship with his neighbours the Harcourts, into whom he was to marry in the 1480s after the death of his first wife Anne Egerton. Peshale followed John Harcourt as sheriff in 1463. Harcourt had served two consecutive terms (1461-3), for which he was later pardoned in parliament with other sheriffs who had similarly erred, on the grounds that there was 'then beyng in this Lande grete trouble and peas [was] not then verely stablished.'⁹⁵ The Harcourts and their associates will be dealt with in detail later. Both this group and the Wrottesley-Blount one contained elements of the now-defunct Ferrers of Chartley affinity and were the means by which Richard, earl of Warwick now intended to express his authority and influence within Staffordshire.

Isolating such family groupings is a standard method of surveying social frameworks; however, given the limited range of evidence available to the historian of the later middle ages, caution must be exercised against unwarranted extrapolation. Even committed placemen prized contacts with several patrons, often receiving offices from these. It is thus impossible to justify a view of county society at this time which depicts exclusive blocs of gentry families who shunned the company of all but one 'good lord' and his fellowship.

Even when evaluating land deeds and the composition of the lists of those mentioned therein, a distinction must be made between those included as neighbours or personal friends and those appearing as political allies. These two categories are, of course, not necessarily exclusive; but neither are they synonymous. For instance, Nicholas Warings of the Lea-by-Wolverhampton who was one of the first Yorkist knights of the shire in Staffordshire in 1461 and served as a justice of the peace throughout the entire decade, had marital links with leading Lancastrians of the area and appeared as late as 22 December 1459 as a feoffee for Humphrey Swynnerton of Swynnerton with Buckingham, John Harper and Thomas Everdon.⁹⁶ Swynnerton, who had been sheriff 1449-50 was the only important Staffordshire gentleman to suffer imprisonment in the early 1460s for his support of Henry VI. From co-feoffee with Buckingham as a loyal Lancastrian to Yorkist stalwart was not the volte-face it might initially appear to have been. Warings' presence on the 1459 deed had nothing to do with political sympathy. He was included as an old friend and feoffee of the Swynnertons of Hilton, half of whose property had passed to Humphrey eleven years earlier. It was these lands that were the subject of the deed in question.⁹⁷

The most politically successful of these clan groupings in Staffordshire in the decade was that centring on the Harcourt family, and in particular John Harcourt of Ranton. Of the four sons of Sir Thomas Harcourt (d.1420), John had the closest connection with Staffordshire. He and the eldest son Sir Robert held the family estates in this county. These were in west-central Staffordshire, Sir Robert's principal manor being at Ellenhall, a mile and a half south of the episcopal palace at Eccleshall, and John's at neighbouring Ranton. John's children married into the cream of the local gentry- the Egertons, Erdeswicks, Lanes, Swynnertons and Wrottesleys. From the 1460s the family was also prominent in leading and lucrative posts in the service of the Stafford family. John was receiver of Caus in 1466 and of Staffordshire 1465-76 for the dowager Duchess Anne, while another brother, William of Maxstoke, was steward of the escheated Warwickshire lands of the future Duke Henry 1460-66.⁹⁸ For this patronage they were greatly indebted to Richard, earl of Warwick, whose loyal supporters they had become.

John Harcourt, as already mentioned, was sheriff of Staffordshire 1461-3, when he was followed by Humphrey Peshale, one of whose father's two executors John had been in 1458. Peshale, whose patrimony at Hopton and Knightley adjoined Harcourt land, was also married to a sister of Hugh Egerton of Wrinehill, whose daughter was the wife of John Harcourt's son and heir, Thomas. In short, when these relationships are put with others to be seen from the genealogies at the end of the thesis, it is clear that a tightly-knit group of neighbouring gentry families had developed and was dominating the major county offices. A few more examples: Harcourt's predecessor as sheriff, Walter

Wrottesley, another Warwick stalwart, was his son-in-law, while two uncles of Hugh Erdeswick III (d.1500), another of John's sons-in-law, Robert Coyney and Thomas Erdeswick, were the county escheators 1460-63; Thomas Basset, sheriff 1465-6 was also closely related. John Harcourt himself followed Basset as sheriff, for a third and final term. Curiously, this powerful grouping had no real effect on the county commissions and it is difficult to assess its contribution to parliamentary elections. Given that it held the shrievalty in 1461, 1463 and 1467, it might be expected that the returns would show evidence of electoral manipulation. Certainly in 1463 and 1467 the knight of the shire who accompanied John Stanley of Elford to Westminster was connected to the clan- Walter Wrottesley and John Delves. However, both of these had separate ties with Warwick and were front-runners for election anyway, so it is difficult to say whether the sheriffs engaged in manipulation. This county lacks a collection of letters to reveal how contested these elections were, though one observer complained that many of the 1463 ones had 'proceeded right inordinately'.⁹⁹ Certainly premeditation seems evident in 1461 when the sheriff Walter Wrottesley presided over the election of his brother-in-law Sir John Gresley, and neighbour Nicholas Warings.

It would be fascinating to know who, following the eclipse of the Staffords after 1460, was elected from their pocket borough of Stafford in 1461 and 1463. Burgesses may have come to the fore; Warwick's influence, extending from his Midland estates or through the Honour of Tutbury (of which he had become steward after Buckingham's death) may have proven over-riding; or it may even have been that the Crown exercised patronage. We will probably never know, as the

returns no longer survive. By 1467, however, the Staffords, now strengthened by the marriage of the Dowager Duchess Anne to Sir Walter Blount, Lord Mountjoy, had recovered their lost influence. John Harper's son Richard and the royal serjeant John Preston were elected. The latter was probably the brother of Philip Preston, the Stafford family's household man, who was escheator that year.¹⁰⁰

The election returns for Newcastle-under-Lyme for 1461 and 1463 are also lost. While the Blount-Stafford axis was comfortably in control of Stafford, the representatives of Newcastle in 1467 reflect the continuing importance of the Duchy of Lancaster in the parliamentary affairs of that borough. Those elected were James Norris of Burton-on-Trent and the lawyer Robert Hill. Before his death Buckingham had controlled one seat and the Duchy of Lancaster the other. In 1467 Clarence's name may be substituted for Buckingham's; Norris was his retainer. This leaves Hill, whose estates lay at Marchington and Houndhill in the Honour of Tutbury as the Duchy nominee. Exactly who among the Duchy officers chose Hill is unclear. Although he appeared on the Readeption commission of the peace, it was probably Mountjoy as steward of the Honour who sponsored Hill and was later, in 1472, to send him again to parliament, this time from his pocket-borough of Stafford. Hill had previously been the county escheator, in 1463-4.

As for the escheators of the 1460s in general, there was a trend towards increased magnate influence in appointments—certainly more than in the previous two decades. Several incumbents, such as Hill, Nicholas Agard (1466-7) and Richard Reed of Newcastle-under-Lyme (1468-9) were Duchy men who owed

their preferment to the good offices of Mountjoy, the steward of the Honour of Tutbury and possibly, in Reed's case, to Clarence who had by then just entered the local political scene, as will shortly be seen. In 1469-70 the escheator was step-brother of Sir John Stanley of Elford (Clarence's retainer), though here, as with Sir John's becoming sheriff a year earlier, ducal influence over this appointment may have been of secondary importance to the Stanleys' intrinsic local preeminence. Magnate influence is more easily detected in the Duchy appointments and those of Philip Preston (1467-8), as just mentioned, and of William Owdeby (1465-6). Owdeby is a shadowy figure, probably from the village whose name he bore- Owdeby, Oldby or Oadby four miles south-east of Leicester.¹⁰¹ As such, he formed part of the Grey of Groby affinity, which was allied to Warwick. He later became the Readeption escheator of Warwickshire.

The role of kinship, which in the 1440s and 1450s had resulted on several occasions in kinsmen holding the shrievalty and escheatorship at the same time or in rapid succession, continued as Robert Coyney, escheator in 1460-1 was followed by his brother-in-law Thomas Erdeswick (1461-3). Then it was given a novel twist, and the escheators of the 1460s, when not obscure non-entities such as Owdeby, Reed or John Lee (1464-5), were usually junior members of prominent county families. There were, for example, Thomas Erdeswick, Nicholas Agard and George Stanley; while Thomas Basset, sheriff in 1465-6, also comes into this category. The Basset family, called by Leland and 'the common people' 'Kinge of the Morelande' of the Staffordshire Peaks¹⁰², were among the last leading local Yorkist partisans to hold county office after the accession of Edward IV. Thomas seems to have been a late substitute for his father (or was it his brother?) William, who died suddenly at that time.

In the mid-1460s Warwick's position both locally and nationally was jolted. The Duchy of Lancaster's north Midland estates, including the Honour of Tutbury, were granted by Edward IV to his younger brother, George, duke of Clarence. Sir Walter Blount became Clarence's steward of the Honour. Blount was an obvious and good choice. Apart from his local prominence, he had become a leading royal advisor and was for a brief period (1464-6) Treasurer until washed away by Earl Rivers in the flood of patronage that flowed towards the Wydevilles after the King had taken to bride one of their number. This rise of the Wydevilles and to a lesser extent the Herberts was at the expense of the Yorkist 'old guard' who had put Edward on the throne, and in particular of Warwick.

While differences over policy towards France and royal marriages, and the gradual cornering of advice and patronage by the Wydevilles undermined Warwick's position at court, the Earl remained in control of Calais and countered his rivals by cultivating the support of Clarence. As far as Staffordshire was concerned, the Wydevilles were to be of no importance, while Clarence's territorial holdings gave him and his allies a prominence which the Earl on his own had lacked and which lack had seriously hindered the extension of Neville in the county.

Dr. Hicks' valuable work on Clarence has shown that his affinity in the north Midlands embraced many of the leading gentry families in the Honour of Tutbury, with John Delves and Sir John Stanley of Elford obtaining leading positions within the ducal household.¹⁰³ That Clarence's retainers should have been Duchy men is hardly surprising, since they were his leading tenants. What is significant is that so many of them, like Delves, Stanley, the Gresleys

and Mountjoy were close associates of Warwick. Warwick and Mountjoy were obvious men to turn to for information and advice about the area. Clarence was inexperienced and, from Warwick's viewpoint, a possible future son-in-law. What could be more natural, then, than for the Earl to suggest men of influence and experience from among his own supporters to Clarence as the ducal affinity and household. At a stroke Warwick was both directing patronage towards his own men and strengthening his influence on the teenaged duke. Mountjoy too had connections with the Gresleys and also with the Wolseleys and Curzons of Kedleston, whom Clarence took on for their legal prowess. Ralph Wolseley had been receiver of the Honour briefly (1460-1) and was kept on as constable of Newcastle-under-Lyme. The final major link in Clarence's affinity in the Honour of Tutbury was the young Henry Vernon, and Vernon too, had developed links with Warwick, despite being from a leading Lancastrian family in the 1450s.¹⁰⁴

The Vernon influence in Staffordshire had diminished since 1451 for several reasons. William Vernon, who succeeded to the family inheritance in that year, was weak and undistinguished, while the Vernons' principal manor in the county, Harlaston, anyway had been left to a younger son, John. The Vernons had also backed the losing magnate faction in 1459-61 and were thus in the political wilderness. As if to compound all of this, the family's troubles were exacerbated by an inherent hot-headedness which was responsible (as a later chapter will describe) for much of the trouble and unrest in the Peak District in the mid-fifteenth century. In 1461 both John and Roger Vernon were ordered to be arrested on different criminal charges.¹⁰⁵ Roger in particular was a troublemaker,

having been at the heart of the Vernons' dispute with their neighbours, the Gresleys of Drakelow in the 1450s.¹⁰⁶

On 1 December 1467 Roger Vernon, possibly trying it on once too often, was killed in a skirmish with some retainers of Henry, Lord Grey of Codnor. This was to highlight magnate differences in the Peak District. Antagonism may have developed after Grey had been appointed to a royal inquiry in December 1463 into raids by the Vernons on property at Haselbeach (Derbyshire)¹⁰⁷, but not even a specially-convened commission of oyer and terminer could discover exactly what lay behind the incident.¹⁰⁸ The presiding justices, Clarence, Hastings and Rivers, were hardly impartial. Clarence was the Vernons' good lord and Hastings had retained Grey back in 1464.¹⁰⁹ In the end the King had to demand recognizances of £1000 from Grey, Henry Vernon and Vernon's brother-in-law the youthful Earl of Shrewsbury.¹¹⁰ Sureties for these three came from Simon Mountfort (for Vernon), Lords Mountjoy and Dudley (for Shrewsbury) and Hastings and Thomas Wingfield¹¹¹ (for Grey).

It has been held that this dispute found a reflection in ill-feeling at court¹¹² and there is truth in this, but it would be well not to see it as a factional feud between 'the King's men' and Clarence or Warwick. Mountjoy and Dudley were ever King's men and had also the experience needed to smooth ruffled feathers. As step-father to Shrewsbury's wife and as Clarence's steward of the Honours of Tutbury and High Peak, Mountjoy in particular was in a position to ease the tension and also had a vested interest in so doing. Shrewsbury had sided with Vernon out of kinship as had Mountfort, being Henry's first cousin. Kinship and good lordship gave momentum to the dispute, but they also helped to contain it.

The dispute is important in that it coincided with the rumblings of serious discontent in national politics and reveals the ending of the lull in factional rivalry that had characterised Staffordshire and Derbyshire politics since the death of Humphrey, duke of Buckingham.

The growing 'strangeness' between Edward IV and Warwick in the second half of the 1460s was due to many factors, not the least of which was the monopolisation of royal patronage by an elite similar to that which operated under Henry VI. Edward's need to prevent widespread disaffection, led to patronage being directed to certain key noblemen, of whom Mountjoy was one. He had been surprisingly poorly rewarded for his support of the House of York. He did not receive any notable grant between 1461 and 1467 and cannot have taken too kindly to being deprived of the Treasurership by a Wydeville, especially as the post was worth at least £1330 a year.¹¹³ After Mountjoy's marriage to Anne, duchess of Buckingham, the King may well have reassessed the value of Mountjoy's past service and, given that lord's long-standing friendship with Warwick and his position as a leading officer of Clarence's estates, realised what dangers would befall if Mountjoy, Warwick and Clarence should spin a web of disaffection in the north Midlands.

Accordingly, Edward set about favouring Mountjoy. On 9 and 14 August 1467 he received the Devonshire estates of the attainted Courteney Earls of Devon¹¹⁴, and on 17 February 1468 a long-standing debt to him from the Crown of £3437 was ordered to be settled by the waiving of customs' duties on Mountjoy's imports and exports.¹¹⁵ Edward's ploy was successful. In September 1468 Mountjoy indented to serve in the Brittany campaign, an expedition vehemently opposed by Warwick¹¹⁶, and soon it was clear to all that the Blount/Stafford axis would

not be siding with The Earl and his affinity. How soon after Clarence dismissed Mountjoy from his Duchy offices is unknown, but when he did the replacement was Henry Vernon for the High Peak¹¹⁷ and probably Tutbury too.

In March 1470 the final split occurred between Edward IV and Warwick, following the production of incontrovertible evidence that the Earl was plotting to place Clarence on the throne. Until then the conspirators had been able to effect reconciliations on the basis that only through unity could Yorkist rule and peace survive. As Miss Scofield has pointed out, in the late 1460s 'what Warwick wanted was not the restoration of Henry VI, much less of Margaret of Anjou, but a chastened Edward who would acknowledge that he had been led astray...and who would turn back with a contrite heart to beg for the friendship and advice of the man who had lifted him to the throne.'¹¹⁸ As late as 7 March 1470 the King had been hood-winked into believing that Warwick and Clarence were assembling troops for him in the Lincolnshire rebellion, rather than against him. On that day he issued commissions of array to those two lords for Warwickshire and Worcestershire. The deception explains why in the first of these counties Warwick and Clarence, with such supporters of theirs as Sir Thomas Ferrers, Sir John Greville and the Hugfords, appear alongside men like Simon Mountfort and his father-in-law Sir Richard Verney of known loyalty to Edward IV.

The deception of the King did not last long. The Lincolnshire rebels were defeated on 12 March and before long, the parts of Warwick and Clarence and their hoped-for end were revealed. By 16 March when Warwick sent his Staffordshire intimate Henry Wrotesley to the King with 'pleasaunte writinges'- a pack of lies concerning

his intentions and direction of march- the game, had he and Clarence but known it, was up.¹¹⁹ At the time the two rebel magnates were moving north from Coventry, where Warwick had set up his headquarters, to Chesterfield. Instead of going along the road to Leicester, where they had agreed to join forces with the King, they chose a route through Burton-on-Trent and Derby. In other words, they marched through the heartland of Clarence's Honour of Tutbury. Yet the considerable support that they expected did not materialise, presumably due to a combination of reluctance to get involved and dissuasion from Mountjoy, who had joined the King's forces.¹²⁰ Thomas, Lord Stanley had promised support, but drew back once news had reached him of how their culpability had been discovered and that the King was unlikely to forgive and forget again. The errant lords fled.

On 26 March a commission of array for Staffordshire was issued, presumably to raise troops for the King to lead against Warwick and Clarence. The commissioners were Mountjoy, Hastings and a phalanx of Yorkist loyalists: William Basset, Sir John Gresley, Philip Okeover, Humphrey Peshale of Hopton, Sir John and George Stanley and the sheriff, Sir Randle Brereton.¹²¹

At this time Mountjoy and his step-son, John, earl of Wiltshire, were also granted authority to pardon any rebels submitting before 7 May.¹²² Wiltshire was a younger son of Humphrey, duke of Buckingham and had only received his title three months earlier. If this and the royal grant to him of £20 a year in January 1470 were part of an attempt on the King's part to secure his family's loyalty, there need have been no cause for worry; the Blount-Stafford family was firmly behind Edward.

Mountjoy's second son, John, was appointed lieutenant of Hammes to strengthen the anti-Neville elements in Calais, who had denied entrance therein to Warwick and Clarence after their flight from England.¹²³

On 25 April these two lords were proclaimed rebels, along with a list of their leading gentry supporters. Few of those named were from either Staffordshire or the Honour of Tutbury. There were only the Wrottesley brothers, Sir Walter and Henry; Roger Draycote, the former Stafford family administrator who had kept a low profile throughout the period of Yorkist rule; and James Norris of Burton-on-Trent, who had been Clarence's nominee for the 'Duchy parliamentary seat' at Newcastle-under-Lyme in 1467 and was probably collected as the lords passed through his home town en route for Chesterfield. The name of John Delves was added to these two days later.

Warwick and Clarence found sanctuary with the former's close friend, King Louis XI of France, and plotting began anew. Warwick, having seen the chances of one of his daughters becoming queen thwarted with England's decisive rejection of Clarence as a replacement for Edward IV, sought for the other a likelier prospect in Henry VI's only child, the Prince Edward. Meanwhile, those of the émigré lords' sympathisers who had remained behind adapted themselves to the loss of their leaders. Archbishop George Neville of York was arrested, but other close associates of Warwick and Clarence remained at large. Shrewsbury took out pardons on 26 April and 22 May, while Clarence's right-hand man in the Honour of Tutbury, Henry Vernon, received his on 20 April and Thomas Burdet twelve days before that. That no-one else from the local gentry,

even those who had had close links with Warwick and/or Clarence, felt the need to seek a pardon at this time of political uncertainty is, like the small number of Staffordshire men who were proclaimed rebels with them, indication of how little support there was in the area for revolt against Edward IV- especially since he was supported by the Blount-Stafford axis. For a while it seemed that the King would prevail utterly and Neville men were purged from offices they held. The main example of this for Staffordshire is that of Ralph Wolseley, who had been fourth Baron of the Exchequer from 29 September 1467.¹²⁴ His appointment was due to his connections with Warwick (whom he had served as victualler of Calais) and more especially Mountjoy, whose brother-in-law he was. However, in the late 1460s Wolseley had adhered increasingly to Warwick and now paid the penalty; he was removed from his post on 14 June 1470.¹²⁵ It would be March 1478 before he was returned to the Exchequer.

However, on 22 July Louis XI effected an uneasy reconciliation between Warwick and Margaret of Anjou and three days later their offspring were betrothed.¹²⁶ On 13 September, taking advantage of Edward IV's preoccupation with what was probably a diversionary uprising in the north, Warwick and Clarence landed in Devon, marched into London on 6 October and there met the pathetic Henry VI, released three days earlier. This time it was Edward IV's turn to flee. Shrewsbury and Stanley were among the first to welcome the readeption of Henry VI, as was Bishop Halse of Coventry and Lichfield, to whom was granted the keeping of the privy seal. As for the county officers, all existing sheriffs were reappointed, though as their

terms of office were due to expire in another three weeks, this can hardly be seen as much of an indication as to political acceptability; that would emerge from the new commissions and appointments of sheriff and escheator.

The Staffordshire appointments are best seen in the context of the north Midlands in general. New sheriffs appeared in all but one of the five counties which bordered upon Staffordshire. The exception was Worcestershire, where curiously Edward IV's appointee, Sir Humphrey Stafford of Grafton, who had replaced Warwick himself on 30 March, was allowed to remain in office—sealing the fate of Sir Robert Harcourt, as will be detailed in a later chapter. In Cheshire, Sir Robert Foulshurst of Crewe replaced Sir William Stanley, who, unlike his brother Lord Thomas, had refused to support Warwick's rebellion.¹²⁷ Foulshurst had been an esquire of the body to Henry VI's son in the late 1450s and was now able to serve again his former master. He may have also had links with Warwick through John Delves who was one of his feoffees in February 1469¹²⁸, and as his father was sheriff of Warwickshire 1433-4, presumably the family had estates there. In Derbyshire, the sheriff was John Stanhope, an experienced administrator and Nottinghamshire parliamentarian, whose close kinsman Sir Robert Strelley had been on the list of proclaimed rebels of 25 April. In Shropshire, the appointee was the bailiff of Shrewsbury, Thomas Horde, a lawyer of great experience, who had been to parliament five times and had served on almost all county commissions since 1453. He was a Talbot man rather than attached to either Warwick and Clarence, and seems to have possessed a silver tongue which got him out of trouble in 1461, 1471 and 1485.

On all three occasions he backed the losing side, even delaying Henry Tudor's march across the Midlands on the last of these. In Warwickshire, Neville supremacy was regularly expressed through control of the shrievalty; particularly noticeable in the late 1460s. On 6 November 1470 William Harewell was appointed sheriff. Harewell is a shadowy figure, probably a son of the John Harewell who was sheriff there in 1428. William was captured at the battle of Barnet and lost his estates temporarily to the neighbouring Worcestershire sheriff Sir Humphrey Stafford of Grafton, whose loyalty to Edward IV never faltered.¹²⁹ Harewell property was mainly in Shropshire and at Ashley and Water Eaton in Staffordshire. His escheator, William Owdeby, had links with Staffordshire too; for although he was from Leicestershire minor gentry stock¹³⁰, he had been brought into Staffordshire by Warwick as escheator in 1465-6. The other escheators were a non descript bunch.

The Readeption sheriff and escheator for Staffordshire, appointed on 8 and 6 November respectively, were John Delves and John Cawardyn. Delves had been sheriff before, 1455-6, during York's second protectorate, but for Cawardyn it was a first appointment. Delves was a member of Warwick's council and had been on Staffordshire commissions since 1463. Just as Ralph Wolseley had split with Mountjoy in the later part of this decade, following Warwick instead of becoming a king's man, so Delves made the same choice, splitting with the Egertons, Harcourts and Peshales. Perhaps he felt that his services had been ill-rewarded; certainly there is no record that he was favoured with grants from the Honour of Tutbury (where many of his estates lay) or anywhere else. Any aggrievement

he might have had would doubtless have only served to strengthen his already-close ties with the increasingly-discontented Warwick. Rewards and responsibilities he had in plenty on the return of Henry VI, Margaret of Anjou and Warwick. The day after becoming sheriff of Staffordshire he was appointed controller of the great customs and the wool subsidy. It seems likely that he returned himself to the parliament for which writs had been issued on 15 October, and may even have been its Speaker. He was also made Treasurer of the Household and on 24 February 1471 joint-warden of the Royal Mint. In short, he was rapidly transformed from a prosperous county gentleman into one of the leading governmental administrators. How much time his duties in London left him for those in Staffordshire is uncertain. Fortunately, he had been provided with an experienced and competent under-sheriff in William Praers of King's Bromley. Praers, like his neighbour and feoffee William Cumberford, was a protonotary in the central courts at Westminster¹³¹, and was also closely connected with his other neighbours the Stanleys of Elford.¹³²

As for John Cawardyn, his was not a political appointment. Like most of the Readeption escheators, he was not replaced on Edward IV's return; indeed he was an elector for Staffordshire in the parliamentary election of 1472. His estates lay at Mavesyn Ridware, a couple of miles from the Praers land at King's Bromley. William Praers' eldest son Roger was a witness to a grant from Cawardyn to Thomas Rugeley of land in Mavesyn Ridware in October 1468¹³³, and the link with the Praers' may have helped bring his name to the attention of the powers that selected Staffordshire's

escheator. However, a more influential link for Cawardyn was his marital one with the Gresleys of Drakelow, into whom he had married and with whom he maintained a close association.¹³⁴

Little of any overall pattern emerges from an analysis of these appointments. Incumbents included both lawyers and 'soldiering gentlemen'. They varied considerably in social status, wealth and as to which good lord each would follow in time of crisis. Yet one characteristic does emerge as common, at least to the sheriffs. They were men of proven reliability upon whose experience the Readeption lords, conscious of the disturbed political atmosphere and amount of opposition to be faced, could rely to keep the peace and secure the election to parliament of partisans ready to attain the exiled Yorkist leadership and vote the necessary funds for the war against Burgundy, which had been the price Warwick and Margaret of Anjou had to pay for French support for the restoration of Henry VI. None of the members of parliament for Staffordshire, county or borough, is known for certain, though it seems likely that Delves was one of the knights of the shire and that Richard Harper sat for Stafford. It has been suggested that William Mitton and/or Robert Hill of Marchington also sat for one of the county constituencies, since both were brought onto the only Staffordshire commission issued during the Readeption- the commission of the peace of 4 December 1470- and this seems plausible.

Those appointed to this commission were Warwick, Clarence, Shrewsbury, Bishop Halse, William Cumberford, Sir John Gresley, Robert Hill, William Mitton,

Sir John Stanley, John Wood and Sir Walter Wrottesley. Its role was to maintain public order, which also might involve preventing any settling of old scores. With their position so precarious, the Lancastrians needed as much support as possible, and in particular from the moderate Yorkist lords. In Staffordshire and the Honour of Tutbury this meant Mountjoy. Little wonder then that on 26 October Clarence issued a general edict to prevent any of that lord's estates being despoiled:

'We wolle and upon pain of deth charge you in oure souverigne lordes name king Henri the sexte that ye ne noon of you of what degre or condicion soo ever ye bee presume atempte or bee soo hardy to spoil or robbe the Manors of Barton & Elveston in the countie of Derby aperteynyng to the Lorde Mounteiu. Ne noon of his servauntes ffermors ne tenauntes ther or elleswhere or any of tham.'¹³⁵

Judging from the appointments to and removals from commissions of the peace in Staffordshire and elsewhere in the north Midlands, there seems to have been some uncertainty as to who among the gentry was 'fit' to serve. For example, Sir John Gresley was removed from the bench in Derbyshire, though retained in Staffordshire; while Thomas Powtrell (one of Mountjoy's closest councillors¹³⁶) was added to the Derbyshire bench on 30 November at a time when his lord was definitely out of favour. It was not until 26 December that Mountjoy and his wife, the Duchess Anne of Buckingham, were even formally pardoned, let alone 'rehabilitated'.¹³⁷ There is also some mystery as to why Clarence's man Thomas Burdet in Warwickshire and, even more so, John Delves and Sir Thomas Astley in Staffordshire were removed from the commissions of the peace. In Delves' case it may have had something to do with pressure of work, but even so it was an unusual move.

In Staffordshire also, Ralph Wolseley, whose career at the Exchequer was abruptly ended because of his support for Warwick, was removed in the Readeption from the bench, upon which he had served since December 1463. His father Thomas was likewise removed, as were Mountjoy, Grey of Codnor, Audley, Dudley, Nicholas Warings and judge Richard Bingham. The dismissal of these lords was to be expected. Grey was one of the closest associates and retainers of Hastings; Audley had been specifically named by the Warwick-backed rebels in Robin of Redesdale's revolt as one of Edward IV's most grasping councillors; and Dudley, who had lost a son, Oliver, at Edgecote fighting Robin of Redesdale in July 1469 and helped organise the Shropshire commission of array of 26 March 1470 for Edward, was also out of favour. Had the restoration of Henry VI lasted longer, then these Yorkist lords would doubtless have been accommodated within the revised political framework. As things turned out, there was no time for that. Curiously, Dudley stayed on as constable of the Tower of London and was instrumental in denying access to the capital to the Bastard of Fauconberg in May 1471.¹³⁸ Whether he also had a hand in the assassination of Henry VI is uncertain, though it seems unlikely and would have been out of character. As for Nicholas Warings, for whom I can find no relevant references, it may be that discussions with his fellow justices had convinced him that it would be wise to distance himself from Warwick and Clarence, especially given the propensity for doing so of Dudley and the Harcourts.

The newcomers to the commission of the peace were William Mitton and Robert Hill. Mitton, like Roger Draycote, was a Lancastrian butterfly emerging after

almost a decade pupating under the Yorkist sun. He disappeared from view after 1461, having been sheriff in Staffordshire in 1442-3 and 1457-8 and in Shropshire in 1455-6 and was on the Shropshire bench from 1440 to 1460. Hill's inclusion was due to a woeful lack of legal expertise on the Staffordshire bench, accentuated by the departure of Bingham. There were two royal justices left, Richard Choke and Roger Bailey, but the interests of at least the first of these lay primarily elsewhere. Hill's prowess and connection with Clarence through the Honour of Tutbury put him on the quorum of the commission. He was later to rise to become deputy steward of the Honour from 1480 to 1483.

Of those continuing from the last issue of the commission under Edward IV (29 March 1469), Sir Walter Wrottesley's retention was a foregone conclusion and John Delves may have been instrumental in keeping his friend John Wood of Keele on the bench. Wood may have had or subsequently developed links of his own with Clarence, for in 1471, while Delves followed Warwick's lead, the Keele lawyer took the field with Hugh Egerton (his other great friend) against the Lancastrians and probably in Clarence's retinue. The retention of Sir John Gresley on the commission is more surprising, given that he had served Edward IV and Richard, duke of York for a decade- a service which had culminated in his appointment to the commission of array against Warwick and Clarence on 26 March 1470. He may have acted in concert with his brother-in-law Sir John Stanley, Clarence's retainer. Curiously, Stanley too was also on the aforementioned commission of array. Perhaps Edward IV did not know whose side Stanley was on; perhaps neither did

Stanley, though he must have realised that, given his prominence within Staffordshire, only his serving militarily on the losing side would put him beyond the political pale.

Clarence's position gave him contact with and (as long as there was lucrative patronage to be dispensed) the cooperation of the local Staffordshire and Derbyshire gentry. However, this is not the same as saying that he and they supported each other. Most of the important gentlemen in the Honour were the Duke's men only when it suited them, as Clarence found to his cost when he tried to raise an army from among them. I write this as a warning corollary against the attractiveness of the 'one man-one lord' idea, lest we forget the power of self-interest and independent thought among the later-medieval gentry. Dr. Hicks, in his thesis on Clarence, though sometimes guilty of exaggerating the strength and permanence of bonds between the gentlemen of the Honour and Clarence and the degree to which those bonds were regarded as more 'meaningful' than ones between those gentlemen and other lords, is surely right to draw to our attention the dangers of over-estimating the influence lords had when appointments concerned leaders of the county gentry. Of Sir John Stanley he questions whether one can attribute his election as a knight of the shire for Staffordshire in 1467 and 1472 to the support of Clarence when Stanley had already been similarly returned in 1447, 1450 and 1463 without ducal influence.¹³⁹ The same sort of question can be asked of Stanley's continued inclusion on the county bench from 1468 until his death eight years later- a period covering not only the Readeption, but also the return of Edward IV. If Stanley's position within Staffordshire was as great as it appears (he was also steward of Bishop Halse's liberty), his and not lordly influence may have kept Gresley in favour.

The alliance of the Lancastrians and Louis XI led to Burgundian aid for the Yorkists. On 14 March 1471 Edward IV, Hastings and Gloucester landed in Yorkshire and began trekking south to confront their enemies. It took about four days for the news to reach Clarence in the West Country, though a landing somewhere along the east coast had been expected.¹⁴⁰ From surviving letters, it is clear that the Duke was using Henry Vernon as his chief-of-staff within the Honour of Tutbury to raise troops and money and as a link with certain magnates whose loyalties were equivocal and support vital.¹⁴¹ This was partially achieved by Vernon coordinating intelligence collecting for Clarence, as revealed in the following letter of 16 March from the latter:

'Henry Vernon. We pray you to finde the meanes as secretly as ye can to have sure and trusti men in the North, or whersoevere therl of Northumberland bee, to espie of the guyding there, and as the cas shall requir and it shalbee expedient to certifie us, and alway whan oon is goon that another bee abiding, and in lyke wyse that ye have about therl of Shrovesbury and the Lord Stanley oon commyng to us and an other alway abiding there.'¹⁴²

Vernon was also instructed to gather information as to the movements and intentions of the recently-arrived King Edward. It seems likely that instead of sending in outsiders for these tasks, Vernon would have used his friendship and connections with those trusted gentry councillors responsible for the 'guyding' to elicit the required information, and simultaneously to 'labour' them to 'labour' their lords into supporting Clarence. In both espionage and 'labouring' Vernon was evidently successful. On 30 March the Duke, by now on the point of affecting a reconciliation with his regal brother, is found thanking Vernon for 'the good devoir that ye have doon in sending forth men to understand of the rule and guyding of E. late King' after learning of Shrewsbury's

'goode and lovyng disposiccion' towards himself.¹⁴³ In the letter this reference to Shrewsbury replaces one stating that the Earl had offered to do service to Clarence; indeed that was something that Vernon himself was loath to provide for his lord on the battlefield. Regular letters from Edward IV, Clarence and Warwick brought scant response from him. On one occasion he bought time from Clarence by writing that he had been en route towards him with troops when he 'misunderstood' yet another of the Duke's letters summoning him and, thinking that the orders had been changed to 'go back!', promptly turned around and went home.¹⁴⁴ Clarence's seething rage can only have been tempered by his dependence on Vernon for whatever support the Honour might raise. Warwick too struggled to secure Vernon's attendance. 'Henry I pray you ffayle not now' he personally scrawled at the foot of a summons of 25 March; all to no avail. Vernon simply would not fight. He avoided the battles of Barnet (where Warwick was killed) and Tewkesbury, but on 6 May, two days after the second of these, was summoned again by the reconciled Clarence for the good of his future.¹⁴⁵ Two days later it was on pain of forfeiting all that he had.¹⁴⁶ Some of these letters may have been general summonses sent out to many important gentlemen, only occasionally personalised, but Vernon's persistent absence was certainly noticed. As the Dukes of Buckingham discovered in 1460 and 1483 and as Clarence should have learned from his recruiting journey with Warwick in March and April 1470, it was just not enough to summon and wait; one's own troops needed to be chased as much as the enemy's. Edward IV's march south from Yorkshire had taken in Nottingham and Leicester, where Hastings was the dominant magnate. Little wonder, then, that 'stirred by his messages sent unto them,

and by his servants, friends and lovers' three thousand of Hastings' tenants and followers responded to his presence and joined Edward IV at Leicester.¹⁴⁷ Gathering an army was not impossible, but it did call for the use of basic psychology. Vernon would have found it nigh impossible to have procrastinated in the way he did had Clarence marched to the Honour or had Warwick not become incarcerated in Coventry.

As with the earlier battles of the Wars of the Roses, lists of combatants at the battles of Barnet (14 April 1471) and Tewkesbury (4 May 1471) are few and lacking in detailed information. At the former battle, where confusion and ill-discipline gave the day to Edward IV, few from the north Midlands were present to witness the final fall of Richard Neville. William Harewell led the Warwickshire shrieval levy and may have been supported by Sir Thomas Astley, but of others on that side there is no record. The arrest of Richard Lowe of Enville in the extreme south-west of Staffordshire was ordered on 9 October 1472 for certain unspecified high treasons and felonies¹⁴⁸, and it is possible that he was part of Harewell's levies or maybe those of John Delves, whose presence at the battle is unrecorded though probable. If John Delves fought at Barnet, then so must have his sons, John and Ralph. Certainly the Delveses were at Tewkesbury, where John was knighted but killed. His son John suffered in the post-battle executions. Ralph survived both events, probably through successfully fleeing the field. Audley's younger brother, Humphrey, was also killed at Tewkesbury, as was Henry Wrotesley. Sir Walter Wrotesley did not participate in these events, being at Calais, helping to maintain its loyalty to the Readeption. He died in prison the following year.

What of the Yorkists? The three thousand men of Hastings' affinity who joined Edward at Leicester had been arrayed and were led by Grey of Codnor, while the Blount-Stafford axis arrived shortly afterwards. This was led by Mountjoy and his eldest son William and Humphrey, duke of Buckingham's sons John, earl of Wiltshire and Sir Henry Stafford. No doubt their troops contained Staffordshire men, though no names are extant. The fighting at Barnet took its toll. William Blount was killed and Sir Henry Stafford was dead by 9 October 1471, probably as a result of wounds suffered here or at Tewkesbury.

Ten names of local men who fought at Tewkesbury survive. It may be that the death of Warwick and the reconciliation of Clarence to Edward IV steeled some martial spirit in the breasts of Staffordshire's gentlemen after Barnet (the final outcome now also not being so finely balanced); but it is equally possible that these known combatants were also at Barnet. Half of the gentlemen were knighted for their pains: Sir Henry and Sir John Ferrers of Tamworth, Sir Nicholas Longford, Sir Humphrey Blount of Kinlet and the new sheriff Sir Henry Beaumont, who presumably led a county posse of sorts. Longford and the Ferrers uncle and nephew would have been in the Hastings contingent¹⁴⁹, Blount of Kinlet's links were with Dudley rather than Mountjoy's side of the family or the Staffords, and Beaumont too was a Dudley associate (being married to Lord John's daughter). Blount and Beaumont may well have used the Dudley affinity as the basis for the county posse, though Dudley himself remained in London, keeping the Tower secure for Edward IV. The other local gentlemen were Clarence's retainer Sir John Stanley of Elford; Nicholas Kniveton, a Hastings retainer who was later, on 29 July 1477, granted the lieutenancy of Kinver

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forest in south-west Staffordshire in return for serving in all the victorious fields within the realm and beyond the sea¹⁵⁰; and three Yorkists from the west of Staffordshire, Hugh Egerton, John Wood of Keele and Humphrey Peshale of Hopton- all of whom had held public office in the county. Their names are known to us as combatants because they were wrongly thought killed together and writs of diem clausit extremum were issued on 29 June 1471.¹⁵¹

After Warwick's death his property fell to his two daughters. The opportunities for aggrandisement attracted Clarence, who had married one of these girls. He seized all the Earl's lands except for the Neville patrimony (held in tail male), disregarding the rights of Warwick's widow and other daughter. After a struggle Clarence had to divide these estates with his brother Richard, duke of Gloucester, who married the other heiress; though they combined to prevent the allocation of dower. Gloucester took Warwick's lands in the north. Clarence's portion lay in the West Country and Midlands, and it was through these Beauchamp estates, which had formed the basis of Richard Neville's influence in Staffordshire and Warwickshire, that Clarence's power was in turn to be exercised, or so he thought.¹⁵²

It was on 20 March 1472, during the period immediately after he had been forced to give way over the Warwick inheritance, that Clarence turned to William, Lord Hastings for some much-needed support and made him steward of his Honour of Tutbury with an annuity of £20.¹⁵³ Although Clarence's misfortunes multiplied when the Honour was taken from him in a parliamentary Act of Resumption in December 1473, Hastings stayed on and prospered, boosted by the burgesses of Derby appointing him steward of their borough earlier in that year. Hastings was to play a leading part in the history of the Honour of Tutbury and to some extent Staffordshire from this time until his fall in 1483, and it is to both him and his affinity that we must now turn.

1471-85

Staffordshire was closely administered by the Yorkists. There were thirty-six major commissions issued for the county between 1461 and 1485, of which twenty-one (almost one a year) were commissions of the peace. As in the 1440s and 1450s the principal view that central government had of the county was reflected in the commissions directed towards it. Henry VI had had a desperate need for money, but for his successors attention was focused on maintaining the loyalty of the county and punishing rebels. While Henry VI between 1440 and 1461 issued ten commissions dealing with financial matters and only four of military importance, those figures were almost reversed by the Yorkist kings (three financial and eleven military). Edward IV and Richard III each issued two commissions of array, while there were commissions to enquire into or seize the goods and property of political losers in May 1461, 1478 and 1484.

The noble contingent of the commissions of the peace was almost predictable and was based, as usual, on the local nobility, Ferrers of Chartley excepted. Clarence, Shrewsbury and Bishop Halse were retained from the Readeption. Audley, Dudley, Mountjoy and Grey of Codnor were reinstated, and there were four new faces: the Stafford lords Buckingham and Wiltshire; William, Lord Hastings; and Edward IV's loyal brother, Richard, duke of Gloucester. Death removed many. Shrewsbury and Wiltshire passed on in 1473, Mountjoy in 1474, Clarence in 1478 and Hastings and Buckingham in 1483. There was no policy of continual replacement and after the dismissal of Audley in the wake of Buckingham's revolt, only Grey of Codnor, who somehow remained acceptable to Richard III after the fall of Hastings, and the octogenarians Dudley and

Halse remained from the high summer of 1471. To these three Richard added Edward, Viscount Lisle and John Howard, duke of Norfolk, men ennobled by Edward IV and who held nothing within the county and upon whose support Richard had relied for his usurpation.

Although, as in the 1460s, a gentry elite continued to dominate the leading county offices for the rest of the Yorkist period, there was a more rapid turnover of personnel in the second part of Edward IV's reign and under Richard III than at the earlier time (due to death and old age as much as anything). Also, a wider circle of leading gentlemen was involved. The importance of faction in the selection of county officials decreased with the death of Henry VI, the apparent permanence of Yorkist rule and the reconciliation of all the local nobility to the new regime. Yorkist stalwarts, such as Gresley, Basset, Wolseley and Stanley, now rubbed shoulders in the sessions of the peace or shared the shrievalty with old Lancastrian and Stafford families: Bagot, Aston, Harper and Egerton.

The first set of commissioners of the peace after Edward IV's return in 1471 included nine gentry members, including four complete newcomers: John Aston, Richard Bagot, William Basset and Hugh Egerton. Three others (Thomas Littleton, Nicholas Warings and Ralph Wolseley) returned after being removed during the Readeption and two others (William Cumberford and Sir John Stanley) continued- business as usual- from the previous king's commission. Stanley had followed Clarence out of and back into Edward IV's favour, while Cumberford was a veteran justice of thirty years standing. He died in the following spring, within months of his former colleagues John Hampton and Thomas Arblaster.

Cumberford was not the only Staffordshire J.P. to die around this time. John Wood, who with his fellow lawyer Robert Hill had been called in in 1474 to replace Cumberford's expertise, died in 1475, with Sir John Stanley following them to their Maker a year later. Meanwhile, Nicholas Warings, about as old as the century, went into retirement in 1475. He had been the only gentleman J.P. not appointed to the commission of 18 August 1473 to collect information concerning royal estates, when his place had been taken by the more sprightly William Harper of Rushall. Harper was also to be Warings' replacement on the county bench, taking up his duties at the time of Warings' final appointment.

The policy of keeping a regular number of gentry commissioners of the peace and only replacing them when they died off, which Humphrey, duke of Buckingham had arranged in the 1440s and 1450s, began to develop in the second reign of Edward IV. Wood and Hill replaced Cumberford, lawyers for a lawyer; Harper replaced Warings, lawyer for lawyer; John Aston replaced Sir John Stanley and Sir John Gresley replaced Hugh Egerton. Thereafter the introductions of Sir John Ferrers and Humphrey Stanley in 1480, and of Humphrey Peshale, William Wilkes and Richard Wrottesley in 1484 were the only major developments before 1485. In the time of Henry VI the commissions had been dominated by work-horse placemen, most of whom had legal skills; in the 1460s the emphasis had lain on a few politically daring and acceptable members of the landed gentry who knew a sword and hunting hounds better than a Year Book or legal precedent; but by the hey-day of Yorkist rule a balance had been found in the distribution of seats between those whose skills and/or social position made it advisable that they be granted the rule of the county.

As mentioned earlier, there had been a preponderance of men from the eastern side of the county and in particular from the Honour of Tutbury in the 1440s and 1450s. In the Yorkist period, especially after 1471 this gradually became a virtual monopoly as the dominant magnates in Staffordshire came to rely on the Honour (and the patronage they, as stewards, derived from it) as the mainstay of their power. Between 1471 and 1485 all but two of the sheriffs came from the east of the county or the Honour of Tutbury, and both the exceptions were from out-of-county (Sir Thomas Wortley of Sheffield, 1483-4; and Sir Marmaduke Constable of Flamborough, 1484-5) - northerners imported by an insecure and wary Richard III. Constable, a knight of the body for Richard, was obviously a man of considerable talents, as he was also appointed steward of the Honour of Tutbury in 1484, he being at the time around thirty years old and not yet come into his inheritance. It may have been Constable's inexperience that prompted the King to send him a set of instructions as to what was expected of him.¹⁵⁴ These were written with the activities of Constable's immediate predecessors (William, Lord Hastings and Henry, duke of Buckingham) firmly in the royal mind. Heading the list of instructions were the following:

'The said Sir Marmaduke shall take the oath of all the inhabitants within the said honour that they shall be true and faithful liegemen unto the king, and not to be retained to any lord or other, but immediately to the king's grace. Also the said Sir Marmaduke shall see that no liveries ne cognizance be given within the said honour contrary to the law and to the statutes thereof made.'¹⁵⁵

Richard's motives were at the same time both general and specific. They were general in that he shared the concern of all later-medieval kings about baronial retinues, which, though rarely the private armies they were portrayed as,

might be used for treasonable practices. Yet they were specific in as much as Richard wanted to destroy a particular north Midland affinity- that of William, Lord Hastings, whom he had had executed as a precursor to seizing the throne. Richard obviously feared that loyalty for the dead good lord might breed or was breeding disaffection among the retinue, despite the support being given to the Crown by Hastings' closest local associate, Henry, Lord Grey of Codnor. Grey, an amateur alchemist¹⁵⁶, transmuted himself out of danger and into Richard's good books. He may well have hoped for the stewardship of the Honour of Tutbury himself as a reward, but instead received property in Rutland and Suffolk in the 1484 parliament for helping to suppress Buckingham's rebellion.¹⁵⁷

There had been several instances of illegal distribution of liveries in the area since 1461. Sir John Gresley had been caught out in 1466 for distributing at Lichfield, Coton, Rugeley, Heywood and Stafford, probably in connection with his feud with the Wolseleys at the time over enclosures.¹⁵⁸ In 1468 Shrewsbury, Mountjoy, Grey, Sir John Gresley and John Cockayne were indicted of illegally giving liveries in the heated months following the murder of Roger Vernon. Professor Ross has suggested that it was this incident that led to the 1468 act of parliament outlawing all giving of liveries.¹⁵⁹ Nine years later Hugh Peshale of Hopton and Knightley (son of the sheriff of Staffordshire in 1463-4 and son-in-law of Sir John Stanley) escaped on a technicality from a charge of distributing liveries to tradesmen from Newport (Shropshire).¹⁶⁰

However, there was no concerted policy of trying to eradicate the indenture system, as the principal culprits, the nobility, were both a class upon which Edward IV had to

rely for support and those whose cooperation would be essential to enforce the statute. The 1468 act made little impression on Hastings. During Edward IV's reign, and particularly after 1474, he built up a ninety-strong retained affinity, based on his position as the King's chamberlain, his stewardship of the Honour of Tutbury and his own estates in Derbyshire and the east Midlands.

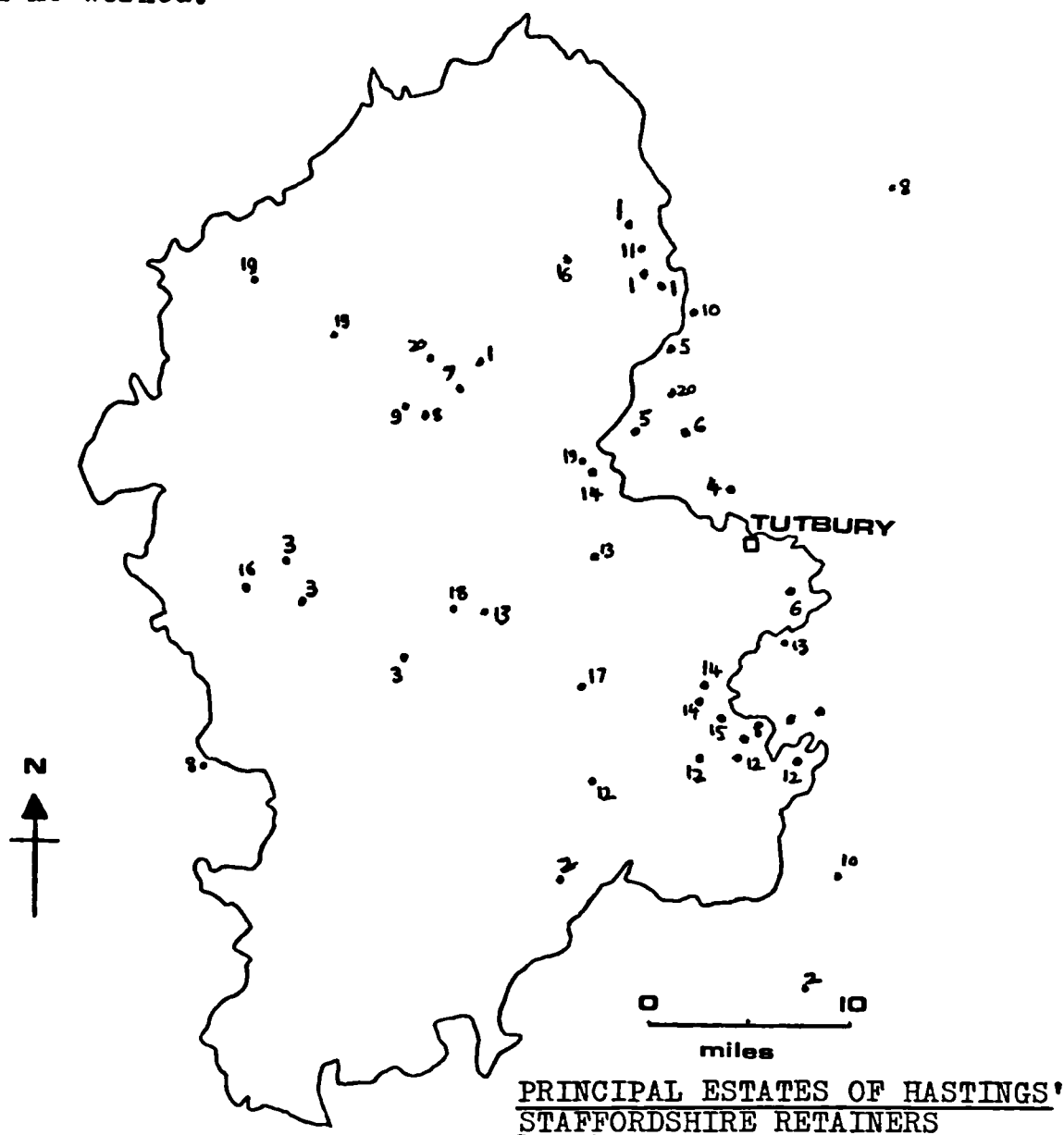
The welter of grants showered upon Hastings after 1461, raising him from a squire of middling fortune to one of the most powerful barons of the land, did not concern Staffordshire. He was appointed to an early Yorkist commission in the county to seize rebel property therein with Sir Walter Blount, but it was not until the second reign of Edward IV when he was appointed to the county bench and, more importantly, his acquisition of high office in the Honour of Tutbury in 1472 that he became a power within Staffordshire. In that year he became steward and surveyor of the Honour, master-forester of Needwood and steward of Newcastle-under-Lyme. As steward, he had at his disposal a wealth of patronage in Derbyshire and eastern Staffordshire; a base from which he developed and 'financed' an affinity to give visible and practical expression to his dominance. In an unpublished paper on Hastings Dr. Colin Richmond has written:

'He had, as men said, the 'rule' of the country where his estates and interests lay. It was here that a lord's power mattered, nor of course was it in any way sinister; without such connections a sheriff or a justice could not expect to carry through his work to its fruition.'

In an age when the king's writ not so much ran as limped arthritically through the shires, the extra-legal support of a magnate was indispensable as a back-up to the legal and governmental processes. The courts, though tiresome and money-sapping, could be used, abused and delayed almost indefinitely

by any self-respecting lawyer; but men thought twice before antagonising and challenging the more immediate power of a local nobleman who knew all the ploys they did and had the resources to employ a few more.

Hastings' retainers in Staffordshire were drawn (not surprisingly) from the eastern side of the county, containing as it did the Honour over which he held sway and the gentlemen with whom he worked.



W.H. Durham in his book on these retainers produces a list of ninety men in that category. Of these, the following thirty-three were either Staffordshire-based or were closely involved with the affairs of that county. I list them with their dates of being

retained (when known)¹⁶¹;

30 May 1464	Henry, Lord Grey of Codnor
6 Nov. 1465	William Basset (1)
22 Nov. 1469	Sir Simon Mountfort (2)
Before 1470	Sir Robert Harcourt (3)
28 Apr. 1474	John Agard (4)
	Nicholas Agard (4)
	Ralph Fitzherbert (5)
21 Oct. 1474	John Harcourt (3) ~
12 Dec. 1474	James Blount (6)
Before 1475	Roger Draycote (7)
	Henry Vernon (8)
10 Mar. 1475	Sir William Trussell (9)
10 Apr. 1475	John Cockayne (10)
14 Apr. 1475	Thomas Cockayne (10)
	Nicholas Meverell (11)
	Thomas Meverell the elder (11)
	Thomas Meverell the younger (11)
16 Edward IV	Humphrey Stanley (12)
	John Stanley (12)
8 Dec. 1477	Sir John Gresley (13)
18 Edward IV	Sir Walter Griffith (14)
18 Apr. 1479	Thomas Curzon (15)
26 Apr. 1479	Thomas Gresley (13)
(27 Apr. 1479	John Harcourt - again)
28 Apr. 1479	Hugh Peshale of Hopton (16)
18 Dec. 1479	Ralph Vernon (8)
23 Feb. 1480	John, Lord Mountjoy (6)
20 Edward IV	Ralph Agard (4)
	John Curzon of Croxall (15)
3 May 1481	Nicholas Rugeley (17)
	Thomas Rugeley (17)
25 Oct. 1481	John Aston (18)
	Ralph Delves (19)
	Nicholas Montgomery (20)

These were no non-entities, scraped from the gentleman-yeoman interface. They were men of note with an independent prominence among their peers, matched by a family history of tenure in the principal offices of county government.

However, before attempting any analysis of the structure, development and influence of Hastings' affinity in Staffordshire, it would be well to interpose some statistics first. During Edward IV's reign Hastings' retainers filled the shrievalty of Staffordshire eight times, that of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire again eight times, and that of Warwickshire and Leicestershire five times- all as set out below:

<u>DATE</u>	<u>STAFFORDSHIRE</u>	<u>NOTTS & DERBYS.</u>	<u>WARWICKS & LEICS.</u>
1466-67	-	Nicholas Kniveton	-
1471	-	-	Simon Mountfort
1471-72	Walter Griffith	Gervaise Clifton	William Moton
1472-73	William Basset	-	-
1475-76	John Aston	William Basset	William Trussell
1476-77	-	Ralph Pole	-
1477-78	-	Gervaise Clifton	-
1478-79	Nich. Montgomery	John Babington	-
1479-80	John Aston	-	Richard Boughton
1480-81	William Basset	Robert Eyre	-
1481-82	Humph. Stanley	-	-
1482-83	Nich. Montgomery	Gervaise Clifton	Thomas Entwistle

This list corrects Dunham's own¹⁶² in that he confuses some of the individuals who held office. For example, the John Harcourt who was sheriff thrice in the 1460s was not the Hastings retainer, John of Ellenhall and Staunton Harcourt, but that John's namesake and uncle, John of Ranton. The sheriff of Staffordshire in 1467-8 was John Acton of Whittington and Kinver, not, as Dunham believed, John Aston of Haywood and Tixall- though Aston was sheriff 1475-6 and 1479-80. Dunham also confuses Hugh Peshale of Horsley, sheriff 1488-9 with the Hastings-livery distributor, hailing from nearby Hopton. Meanwhile in Derbyshire, the sheriff in office 1472-3 and 1486-7 was from the Kedleston branch of the family, whereas the John Curzon who was retained with his father Thomas by Hastings was from the Croxall (Staffordshire) branch; and the Nicholas Kniveton, who was sheriff 1493-4 was the son of the Hastings retainer, not the retainer himself. 29

Between Hastings' execution in 1483 and the close of the century the following retainers of his were sheriffs in these three shrievalties: Staffordshire- Sir Humphrey Stanley (1485-6 and 1493-4), Sir Thomas Gresley (1489-90 and 1497-8) and Roger Draycote the younger (1491-2); Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire- Sir Gervaise Clifton (1487-8), John Leek (1488-9), Nicholas Kniveton (1489-90), Henry Willoughby (1495-6) and Ralph Shirley (1496-7); Warwickshire and Leicestershire- Ralph Shirley (1493-4).

Gathering up these data, it appears that in all seven sometime retainers of William, Lord Hastings were appointed sheriff of Staffordshire a total of thirteen times. Of these appointments, only eight were made during the magnate's lifetime. Half of these were made before the individual concerned had become a retainer and half after. In short, only William Basset in 1472 and 1480, Humphrey Stanley in 1481 and Nicholas Montgomery in 1482 were made sheriff of Staffordshire while they were Hastings' retainers. In the surrounding counties a different pattern emerges. Hastings recruited men from the leading ranks of the gentry, though few had as yet been county officers. Fourteen sometime retainers were sheriffs in Derbyshire or Warwickshire a total of twenty-one times. Nine of these occasions were after 1483, so Hastings' influence can hardly have been responsible in these cases. Of the remaining twelve appointments three were made before the individual was retained and eight after. For the remaining one we do not have the date of retention.

There is too small a sample of Hastings' retainers as escheators¹⁶³ for any definite conclusions to be made for that office. As for members of parliament, in

the counties of Stafford, Derby and Warwick nine retainers sat a total of seventeen times (a further six occasions for which there is no evidence may also be postulated). These were James Blount (Derbys 1472-5, 1491-2), Richard Boughton (Warwicks 1472-5), Robert Eyre (Derbys 1459), John Gresley (Staffs 1450-1, 1453, 1461-2, Derbys 1460-1, 1478), Thomas Gresley (Stafford borough 1478), Nicholas Longford (Derbys 1472-5), Simon Mountfort (Warwicks 1463-5, 1478 and possibly others after 1483), Humphrey Stanley (Staffs 1491, 1495 and possibly others after 1483), and Henry Vernon (Derbys 1478, 1491-2 and possibly 1470-1, 1483 and 1489-90). Of these nine men Eyre (retained 1476) and Boughton (retained 1479) only sat before being retained and Stanley only after Hastings' death.

A glance at the dates of election clearly shows that most of the times when these men were sent to parliament occurred either while Hastings exercised as yet little influence in the area or after his death. Only in 1472 and 1478 was Hastings in a position to influence elections, certainly in Staffordshire, being steward of the Honour of Tutbury on both occasions.

The Honour of Tutbury, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, had as part of its patronage one of the parliamentary borough seats at Newcastle-under-Lyme. None of the members for this constituency at this time was a Hastings retainer, yet it is hardly credible that he would have let slip such an obvious perk. So it would be as well not to identify too exclusively retention with electoral manipulation; that is, that only individuals retained by Hastings could have had their elections influenced by him.

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It is correctly numbered.

FOOTNOTES

1. The registers are at the diocesan record office at Lichfield (cited as LJRO):
 - LJRO, B/A/1/9 Heyworth
 - LJRO, B/A/1/10 Booth
 - LJRO, B/A/1/11 Close and Boulers
 - LJRO, B/A/1/12 Halse
 - LJRO, B/A/1/13 Smith and ArundelThe manorial and receiver's accounts are at the county record office at Stafford (cited as SRO), the William Salt Library, Stafford (cited as WSL), the Public Record Office (cited as PRO), and Lichfield Joint Record Office:
 - SRO, D(W)1734/3/2/1-4
 - SRO, D(W)1734/J.1948, J.2032 and J.2046
 - WSL, Original collection, SMS 3351
 - LJRO, B/A/21/123312, 122314-5, 124075 and 124078-9
 - PRO, Ministers and Receivers Accounts, SC6/Hen.VII/1846.
2. S.Shaw, The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire, (London, 1798-1801), I, p.231.
3. Ibid., I, p.271.
4. LJRO, B/A/1/9 fo.188^R.
5. E.Axon, 'The family of Bothe (Booth) and the church in the 15th. and 16th. centuries', Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, LIII(1938), pp.36-49.
6. T.Wright (ed.), Political poems and songs relating to English history, (Rolls Series, 1859-61), II, pp.224-9.
7. T.Gascoigne, Loca e libro veritatum: passages selected from Gascoigne's theological dictionary illustrating the condition of Church and State, (ed.) J.E.T.Rogers (Oxford, 1881 edition), pp.47-8, 52, 194.
8. Calendar of Papal Registers- Papal Letters, X (1447-55), (H.M.S.O., 1913), p.59.
9. J.Strachey and others (ed.), Rotuli Parliamentorum, (London, 1767-77), V, p.216. Other Staffordshire names in the list were John, Lord Dudley, William Mynors, John Hampton and the Stanleys of Elford.
10. e.g. Ibid., V, p.241.
11. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1452-61, p.359.
12. According to D.Jones, The Church in Chester 1300-1540, Chetham Society, third series, VII(1957), pp19-20 Whelpdale, who was a prebendary of St John's collegiate church in Chester 1453-4 had been receiver-general to the bishop of Carlisle. This was Nicholas Close, who became bishop of Coventry and Lichfield in 1452 and presumably was instrumental in bringing Whelpdale to this area. He (Whelpdale) was receiver-general for his master's new see by Michaelmas 1453, by which time Close was dead. It seems likely that Close brought him to Lichfield as receiver-general and that Whelpdale's appointment as such for this diocese dates from Michaelmas 1452, just before Close's death.

A case in point was that of the East Anglian lawyer William Paston, who was the Duchy nominee for Newcastle-under-Lyme in 1472 and possibly in the Readeption parliament as well. How does one categorise him? J.C.Wedgwood argues that Paston owed his seat to the Staffords, through a fortuitous marriage to a daughter of Edmund, duke of Somerset (died 1455)¹⁶⁴, while Dr. Hicks claims him for Clarence.¹⁶⁵ However, Hastings was just as much Paston's good lord as the others, though there was no indenture of retention. A link between Hastings and Paston has been traced from at least as early as 1462, and Paston's nephews were certainly in that lord's retinue at Calais in the 1470s.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, Hastings tried (unsuccessfully) to get a Paston elected to the 1472 parliament, for Maldon (Essex). A servant of the Duchess of Norfolk wrote to the bailiff there, advising him to ensure that the burgesses elected 'a man of worshep and of wytt', namely Sir John Paston. The servant continued, 'what my seyde lord Chamberlain [i.e. Hastings] may do wyth the Kyng and wyth all the lordys of Ingland I trowe it be not vnknowyn to you.'¹⁶⁷ We may presume that a similar letter was sent to the authorities in Newcastle-under-Lyme, 'advising' the election of Sir John's uncle William.

The 1472 elections in the area certainly were not dominated by Hastings. In Derbyshire James Blount's election was a function of the power of the Stafford-Blount axis (he being Mountjoy's third son), while Dudley's son Edmund and Clarence's retainer Sir John Stanley were Staffordshire's knights of the shire. As in 1467, the importance of Clarence's links with Stanley is open to question. Besides being from the top rank of the county gentry and an experienced administrator, Stanley had recently fought for Edward IV, which can only have improved his standing in the eyes of his peers. Another of the victorious Yorkist army, John Wood,

was Paston's accompanying M.P. from Newcastle-under-Lyme. The members from Stafford were Robert Hill and Richard Harper. Harper was a Stafford servant, whose brother William was that noble family's steward of Staffordshire. Both Richard and Hill (who had evidently done himself no serious harm by serving the Readeption lords) had represented the county at the previous parliament- Harper again for Stafford and Hill as the Duchy nominee for Newcastle. Stafford borough's parliamentary representation was as usual firmly under the control of the Staffords.

In Warwickshire the knights of the shire were John Hugford and Richard Boughton. Here again Hastings' power is not apparent. Hugford had been a Beauchamp and Neville servant and turned after 1471 to Clarence, the inheritor of those north Midland estates, which it had been a great part of his life's work to administrate.¹⁶⁸ Boughton did eventually become a Hastings retainer, though not until 1479 and there is no evidence of a close association between the two men in the early 1470s.

In short, Hastings' influence on the elections of 1472 in the area including and adjacent to Staffordshire was minimal, being confined to possibly getting William Paston elected for Newcastle-under-Lyme and Nicholas Longford chosen as a knight of the shire for Derbyshire. Again, Longford had been at the battle of Tewkesbury and this may have increased his standing in the eyes of the electorate independent of what Hastings felt or did. Hastings had not been steward of the Honour of Tutbury long enough to establish himself or his 'rule' in the area, and both the Blount-Stafford axis and Clarence were still major powers in the area to be worked or contended with. The former was particularly well in with

the King and managed to gain control of the wealthy coheiresses of Sir John Delves- one was married off to James Blount, the other to the Staffords' councillor Sir Robert Sheffield.

In 1478, when Hastings' power in parliamentary elections was at its zenith, neither of the borough members from Newcastle-under-Lyme was his man, retained or not. One, William Young was a local burgess from nearby Charnes. Young has no known political affiliations, though Dr. Hicks chooses to place him among the King's Servants in that parliament.¹⁶⁹ Charnes lay in the heart of the territory of the Bishops of Coventry and Lichfield and the presence of the episcopal receiver-general and several estate officials on the election return seems to indicate Bishop Halse's support for Young.¹⁷⁰ Halse had by this time become a trusted councillor of Edward IV. The Staffords had managed to recover the patronage of the other seat, as in the time of Duke Humphrey. The death of Mountjoy in 1474 prevented any weakening struggle for control of the family affinity and influence between him and Duke Henry. Yet Henry did not initially enjoy complete control of his inheritance; dower was being drawn from it by two extremely talented women, his mother Lady Margaret Beaufort and his grandmother the dowager Duchess Anne. It was Lady Margaret's steward, Reginald Bray (later to become Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster under Henry VII), who was the Stafford nominee in 1478.

The electors of Stafford borough returned two young men of famous stock, Thomas Gresley and John Egerton. Both had fathers who were on the county bench and who had been retainers of Humphrey, duke of Buckingham in the 1450s. Sir John Gresley was returned at the same election as knight of the shire for Derbyshire, while Hugh Egerton, steward, constable

and mayor of Newcastle-under-Lyme, had relinquished the shrievalty only weeks before the election. Thomas Gresley and John Egerton also just happened to be brothers-in-law. Both were, however, young and inexperienced and undoubtedly owed, if not their elections, certainly their nominations to the power and 'worship' of their illustrious fathers. With Hugh Egerton firmly ensconced as the leading Duchy official in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Sir John Gresley retained by Hastings on 8 December 1477, it would seem that here at last is evidence of Hastings' men being placed in parliament, especially as the borough in question was usually the preserve of the Stafford family (with the Blounts in the previous dozen years). Yet men such as Gresley and Egerton were experienced and leading county gentlemen in their own right and would have been leading contenders for election anyway. Sir John Gresley had been returned to parliament on four previous occasions and, with the death of Sir John Stanley in 1476 and John Hampton four years before that, was the area's most experienced parliamentarian. He, not Hastings, would have sponsored his son's election and possibly that of his son-in-law John Egerton as well. Gresley and Hugh Egerton were the sort of men whom a lord latched onto as useful vehicles to express his influence. He did not advance them since, in a sense, they no longer needed advancement (being leaders of the county community already), though their standing was no doubt buttressed by being known as his associates. Hastings' part in the election was not that he forced his men upon the electorate, but that he persuaded reliable friends to stand.

The one member of parliament from a Staffordshire constituency whom Hastings may have used his influence to have elected was Sir John Ferrers of Tamworth, one of the

knights of the shire. Like Thomas Gresley and John Egerton, Ferrers and his companion county member John Bagot were only heirs to their family estates. Was there perhaps a reluctance among leading county gentlemen of their fathers' generation to attend the 1478 parliament, which after all had been called mainly to sanctify the execution of Clarence? The election of Young from Newcastle-under-Lyme would seem to support such a theory; he was hardly a notable gentleman, neither had any bishop of Coventry and Lichfield been allowed any say in previous elections, while no local man had been sent to Westminster since the heady days of 1455.

The county's contingent was thus a non-entity, a widow's household servant and four gentlemen's sons. Staffordshire reacted to political murder as she had to military campaigning; she did not want to know. Sir John Ferrers was Hastings' nephew and John Bagot was the sheriff's son, but the election was not so much rigged as a foregone conclusion by default. The end result, with Hastings and perhaps Halse providing the King with representatives who would vote as required, was consented to by the county, not forced upon them. Nonetheless, for Hastings, Edward IV and of course the hapless Clarence the end result was all that mattered.

The figures for justices of the peace are also significant, especially in the light of the following famous extract from a letter written in the mid-1470s to Sir William Plumpton:

'As for the message to my Lo. Chamberlain,
 what time I labored to him that ye might
 be Justice of the peace, he answered thus;
 that it seemed by your labor and mine, that
 we wold make a jelosie betwixt my Lo. of
 Northumberland and him, in that he shold
 labor for any of his men, he being present.'¹⁷¹

If Hastings was sufficiently well placed to influence the commission of the peace in Yorkshire (for that was the county whose bench the writer was alluding to), how much more was this true for Derbyshire and Staffordshire where he had greater interests and power. In Staffordshire his noble retainers on the bench were Grey of Codnor from 1468 onwards and John, Lord Mountjoy from 1480 to 1483. Of the gentlemen on the six commissions of the peace issued for Staffordshire while he was steward of the Honour of Tutbury, few were Hastings' retainers. There was only one, William Basset, until 1477, then Sir John Gresley was retained, to be followed by Humphrey Stanley in 1480 and John Aston in 1481. Gresley and Aston were retained while already on the bench. At the time of Hastings' death only four of the ten gentry J.P.s in Staffordshire thus were his retainers. The comparable figure for Derbyshire was three retainers out of six gentry appointees with Grey of Codnor again being a noble retainer and incumbent.

After Hastings' fall Basset and Stanley were taken off the bench in Staffordshire (the former was to return briefly under Richard III, December 1483 to February 1484), but Grey, Mountjoy, Gresley and Aston remained. Meanwhile in Derbyshire all of Hastings' retainers on the bench kept their places after June 1483 and one more, Ralph Fitzherbert, was even added. In short, when Hastings fell, the Hastings affinity as such may have disappeared, but the power, position and influence of its constituent gentlemen remained intact. To what can this be attributed? It can be partially explained by Simon Stalworth's well-known phrase in a letter to Sir William Stonor on 21 June 1483 'all the lord Chamberleyne mene

be come my lordys of Bokynghame menne.'¹⁷² Hastings' men may have turned to Buckingham as the man most likely to succeed, but surely their principal concern was to get well in with the most powerful magnate in the area (if not the country) and the obvious choice as Hastings' successor in the Honour of Tutbury. Yet it all went deeper than mere pragmatism. The very nature of the Honour, being Crown land administered by a powerful favourite, minimised the loyalty of the Duchy tenants to any particular individual. Whoever became steward needed their cooperation and support and would in turn be well placed to be an effective good lord for them. When political fortunes changed and a new steward was appointed none of the requirements, possibilities or relationships needed to be changed. The leading gentlemen of the Honour could therefore eschew factionalism, confident that their best interests were served by giving allegiance and good service to the stewardship rather than any particular incumbent.

With the gentry of the Honour of Tutbury being the 'mene' of Hastings as steward and not of Hastings as provincial lord, adopting the frequency with which his indentured retainers occupied county offices or sat in parliament as the yardstick to determine his local influence is fraught with danger. Did Hastings ever realise how brittle his support within the Honour was? I think so and seriously doubt whether he ever aspired to dominate Staffordshire and Derbyshire through his stewardship. In order to understand why this may be so, it is necessary briefly to describe how Hastings' affinity in the area was put together.

Those retained before 1474 were all Hastings' neighbours, save Sir Robert Harcourt. In so retaining, Hastings was merely

doing what most minor noblemen did. Harcourt and Simon Mountfort (knight of the shire for Warwickshire in 1478 and Henry Vernon's surety for good behaviour in the 1467-8 feud with Grey of Codnor) were attracted from the Neville affinity, the growing disaffection of whose leader, Warwick, the duo viewed with alarm and distaste. Ultimately, it was not only these supporters and the ear of Edward IV that Hastings took from the Earl. Warwick had built up a powerbase within an area where neither he nor Hastings was territorially strong through external patronage and internal kinship networks- but it was left to Hastings to refine these principles to perfection.

Once Hastings had become steward of the Honour of Tutbury he began retaining large numbers of the local gentry. Whether they beat a path to his door or they to his is unclear, though many of the contracts recorded that the retention was at the retainer's 'own desire and motion'. The heart of the affinity lay in the Honour and it was the leading officials of the Honour who were among the first to be retained; men such as John Agard, Ralph Fitzherbert and James Blount, together with Clarence's (bequeathed?) associates Henry Vernon and Roger Draycote. It soon became a family affair, with fathers and sons, brothers, uncles and in-laws signing, sometimes together, for the lord. There were three Agards, three Meverells and two from each of the Blounts, Cockaynes, Curzons of Croxall, Harcourts, Rugeleys, Stanleys and Vernons. Thus twenty of the thirty-three retainers came from only nine families.

The Cockaynes and Meverells, together as usual, threw in their lot with Hastings in April 1475. Soon they were being followed by the recently-bereaved Stanley brothers and the Stanleys' uncle, Sir John Gresley. In 1479 Gresley's son

Thomas and the Stanleys' brother-in-law, Hugh Peshale of Hopton, were among those added to the ever-increasing number of retainers. Over the next two years members of the already-represented Agard, Blount, Curzon and Vernon families were retained, together with the Rugeley brothers and the brothers-in-law John Aston and Ralph Delves (Delves was also uncle to James Blount's wife) and finally Nicholas Montgomery, sheriff of Staffordshire in 1478-9 and 1482-3. The affinity was still being added to when Hastings was executed.

Two points emerge from this. Firstly, Hastings recruited almost exclusively from within the Honour of Tutbury. Secondly, he evidently placed great importance on 'the family' and kinship networks as media through which to develop his affinity. It is equally important to note those whom he did not retain. Why, for instance, did he not retain Sir John Stanley of Elford but did sign up Stanley's sons Humphrey and John II as soon as the old man died? Why were the Curzons of Croxall retained while their more important kinsmen the Curzons of Kedleston apparently went unnoticed? Why were none of his own close kinsmen and supporters the Ferrers family of Tamworth retained? Why, as steward of the Honour, did he have nothing to do with Hugh Egerton, the most important figure in Newcastle-under-Lyme? I find it hard to accept that personal animosity accounts for all these oversights, if such they were. Yet above all there is the question as to why his affinity virtually ignored the rest of Staffordshire. No Bagots, Mittons, Harpers, Swynnertons or Egertons grace Hastings' affinity and an Aston was only added comparatively late, in October 1481. Perhaps this situation would have been rectified had Hastings lived longer. As it was, there is no evidence that he attempted to build a countywide affinity in Staffordshire.

There were two basic reasons for Hastings' reluctance to seek retainers from all over Staffordshire. The first was that to have done so or to have tried to pack the county offices with his men would have brought him into conflict with the Staffords. Hastings and Gloucester needed the support of Henry, duke of Buckingham for their struggle within the court and council against the Wydevilles. As steward of the Honour, he was 'entitled' to draw retainers from that part of the county, but to have begun poaching on Buckingham's home ground would have been politically out of the question. Hastings did, however, retain Walter, Lord Mountjoy's son James and grandson and heir John.

The second reason was that Hastings did not have the resources to finance such a move. While dealing with the gentry of the Honour, he could dispense local patronage through the multitude of offices and perquisites available to him as steward. However, he would have needed other, probably financial inducements to win support from areas of the county in which he held neither property nor office.

Unlike Humphrey, duke of Buckingham, Hastings gave virtually no annuities. The only two men out of the ninety that Hastings retained from all over England who received fees were Sir William Trussell and Nicholas Kniveton. Trussell was a Warwickshire knight with no connection with the Honour of Tutbury (though he did hold property in Staffordshire at Acton Trussell). He received £10 a year. Kniveton was one of Hastings' earliest retainers and was paid £4 a year from 1465. Yet even this modest sum was withdrawn in 1474 when a second contract was drawn up. Why did Hastings offer no fees? Dunham believed that good lordship supplanted cash annuities in Edward IV's reign as a refinement of the indenture system.¹⁷³

However, good lordship had always been part of the bastard feudal contract. It was understood, if not always specifically written into the indentures. Supporting those who were to support you was a good basic psychology ('pour encourager les autres'). In the Hastings contracts it was not that something new had replaced something old, merely that something of the old had been dispensed with. It seems likelier that the absence of cash annuities was to be compensated for by patronage directed to the retainers by Hastings from the Honour of Tutbury. Perhaps Hastings was also loath to waste good money on men whose loyalty to him personally was not to be relied upon.

Yet, like Buckingham a generation earlier, Hastings could not go around making enemies from among the leading county gentlemen with impunity. He and they needed each other's if not support certainly acquiescence.

The sheriffs in the second reign of Edward IV were, as mentioned earlier, all from the eastern side of the county. The sixteen Edwardian gentry commissioners of the peace provided eight sheriffs and one escheator between 1471 and 1483.

The only other sheriffs were Sir Walter Griffith (1471-2); George Stanley (1473-4), who was Sir John's step-brother; and Nicholas Montgomery of Cubley (derbyshire) and Caverswall (1478-9 and 1482-3). All of these eleven sheriffs came from families with a tradition of serving in county office and had fathers and/or grandfathers who had been sheriff of Staffordshire, while families like Aston, Bagot, Gresley and Griffith had been providing sheriffs for far more than a couple of generations. These were certainly not 'new men'.

The escheators of the period too were from long-established families, though as in earlier decades usually of a slightly lower social status. Perhaps the requirement

passed by parliament in 1475 that escheators hold property worth at least £20 in the county where they were to hold office was adhered to.¹⁷⁴ Escheators were also ordered at this time not to 'sette to ferme' their offices. Did this go on in Staffordshire at the time? In the 1420s several escheators had served two-year terms¹⁷⁵, but in the following half century only Thomas Erdeswick in the disturbed period 1461-3 held the position for more than a year at a time. However, in 1474 Humphrey Swynnerton the younger, an impoverished twenty-one year old gentleman began an unprecedented five-year term. His accounts exist for 1474-5 and 1475-9¹⁷⁶, and given his financial problems (see the final chapter for details), he may well have sought the post as a way to earn money. Swynnerton was under the thumb of the Harcourts, the only leading county family who did not play a direct part in the governance of the county. They also had connections with the family of Swynnerton's predecessor, Thomas Swineshead of Swineshead-by-Eccleshall, as did the Talbots,¹⁷⁷

The Honour of Tutbury provided Staffordshire's escheator in 1471-2 (John Mynors), 1483-4 (John Agard) and 1484-5 (Robert Hill). All of these were men of considerable experience. Mynors had been joint-bailiff of the New Liberty in Staffordshire for the Honour of Tutbury with his father from 1443 to at least 1461¹⁷⁸ and was one of the collectors of the parliamentary war subsidy in 1472.¹⁷⁹ His family provided one of the five hereditary foresters in fee in the Needwood forest and had as his sheriff at the time Sir Walter Griffith, who was another of these foresters. Agard too was an important figure in the Needwood, as the following chapter will show, while Hill, a veteran of several Yorkist commissions and

parliaments, provided (with Agard) Richard III with the experienced and dependable service he needed after appointing Marmaduke Constable as steward of the Honour and sheriff in 1484.

Buckingham's revolt and subsequent execution led to his attainder in the parliament of 1484, following which Sir Thomas Wortley, the Yorkshire knight imported by Richard III (presumably because he could not bring to mind anyone in Staffordshire whom he could trust) was made steward of the Duke's estates in Staffordshire and was also granted Madeley.¹⁸⁰ Most of the rest of the Staffordshire estates were then leased to John, Lord Dudley.¹⁸¹ The sudden fall of Hastings and Buckingham left the two principal affinities in the county leaderless. Sir Marmaduke Constable, the new steward of the Honour of Tutbury, neither was of the same social rank as his two immediate predecessors nor possessed their wealth and influence. He was in no position to build an affinity; in fact his instructions and very appointment seem to indicate that the King had quite the opposite in mind.

The removal of three J.P.s, William Harper, Sir John Ferrers and Richard Bagot, following Buckingham's revolt stemmed from Richard III's uneasiness over their connections with the fallen magnates. Harper (also escheator in 1479-80) was the eldest son of Humphrey, duke of Buckingham's confidant John Harper of Rushall, and was steward and receiver of the Stafford family's estates in Staffordshire. William's brother Richard had been elected to parliament in 1467, 1472 and 1478 from Stafford family pocket boroughs and was an executor of the late Duchess Anne. Sir John Ferrers had been a close kinsman of Hastings and had also married his heir into the Harpers. Richard Bagot was, like William Harper, from a family with a record of service to the Staffords. At the end of 1483

the Bagots decided that they were in need of good lordship and turned to Henry, Lord Grey of Codnor, by whom Richard and his son John were retained on 31 December. Their indentured contract¹⁸², printed below, shows many similarities with those drawn up by Grey's former friend Hastings:

'This indenture made the last day of december the fyrst yere of the regne of kyng Richard the thyrde betwene herry lord Grey on the ton partie and Richard Bagot & John his sone & heire on the tother parties wytnesyth that the seid Richard & John bynde them be this indenture to be reteyned wyth the seid lord and to take his part ayens alle men savng [sic] ther legans duryng there lyves and in lyke forme therever herry Lord Grey to be speciall gode lord to them and to take ther part in alle maters of ryght and at syche tyme as the seid herry lord Grey sendyth for the seid Richard & John or ether of them or any of theres to do hym servys ether in warre or in paes [sic] the seid lord to [pay] for ther costes cumyng & goyng & as longe as they abyde wyth hym in his servys In wytnes wher of ether parties to other hath set ther seales the day & yere a bove seid.'

As in the Hastings indentures, there was no mention of a fee, only that Grey would be their 'speciall gode lord'. That the contractual obligations were to be for life and were saving the Bagots' allegiance to the Crown were standard features in such deeds. Above all, there is a vagueness in the obligations, which, as in the instruments used by Hastings, contrasts with the security which the envisaged relationship was designed to bring about and also with the precise details (such as the numbers of troops to be brought and the area of service) which appeared in the indentures of Humphrey, duke of Buckingham in the 1440s and 1450s.

John, Lord Dudley was the only local nobleman Richard III trusted sufficiently to lead the commissions of array in May and December 1484. Dudley, who in his mid-eighties,

seems to have kept all his faculties even at so great an age, besides leasing Stafford family property in the county as noted earlier, was also behind the inclusion of two of his men on the commission of the peace. The trio of Harper, Ferrers and Bagot was replaced by Humphrey Peshale, William Wilkes and Richard Wrottesley. Wrottesley, the son of Warwick's steward Sir Walter, was married to the sister of Dudley's grandson and heir. Wilkes was a lawyer of great experience from Autherley-by-Wolverhampton- a manor partially held by the Stanleys of Elford, for whom he acted as attorney in their struggles with the Wrottesleys and Leghs of Adlington over three Cheshire manors.¹⁸³ Wilkes was also attorney for many other south Staffordshire figures, such as the Wrottesleys (on other occasions), William Fowke of Brewood, John Northall and of course Dudley. As William Cumberford had been, Wilkes was also a protonotary in the court of Common Pleas.

Staffordshire's reaction to the usurpation of Richard III was a quiet one. Only one gentleman is known to have followed Buckingham into revolt (John Harcourt of Ellenhall), though the events of 1483 in general must have stunned the county and have made its inhabitants even less willing than ever to take an interest in national politics. Dudley and Ferrers of Chartley supported Richard, though Audley, removed from the Staffordshire, Shropshire and Derbyshire benches in 1483, was apparently less enthusiastic. The Stanleys in Cheshire were equally uneasy about Richard, though, like the Staffordshire gentry, distanced themselves from Buckingham's revolt. Thomas, Lord Stanley had married Buckingham's aunt, the mother of Henry, earl of Richmond, and was fortunate not to suffer the same fate as Hastings. The Stanleys, with Reginald Bray, Gilbert Talbot (uncle of the infant Earl of

Shrewsbury and in Calais James Blount, were principals in a plot to put Richmond on the throne¹⁸⁴ ; a plot which resulted in his landing at Milford Haven on 7 August 1485. Richard was at Nottingham at the time and only heard of the Tudor arrival four days later. Richmond's march to meet Richard took him through the heartland of his supporters' territory: Carmarthen; Shrewsbury; Newport (Shropshire), where he was joined by Gilbert Talbot and two hundred men; Stafford on about 17 August; Lichfield, where the city received him honourably; Tamworth; and on into Leicestershire to be greeted by the Stanleys and their associates the Savages.

At the battle of Bosworth on 22 August 1485 Richard III was supported by Shrewsbury, Ferrers of Chartley, Humphrey Stafford of Grafton and John Sackeherell from the Staffordshire area. Meanwhile the rebel army included, besides the principals already named, Richard Bagot, Humphrey Cotes, Thomas Curzon of Croxall, Hugh Peshale of Hopton (still bearing a grudge against the murderer of his lord Hastings), Robert Harcourt the younger, Sir Humphrey Stanley of Elford, and possibly several others. Peshale was knighted for his martial services, but Bagot, Cotes, Curzon, Ferrers of Chartley and Sackeherell fell in battle. Stafford of Grafton fled with his brother to sanctuary at Colchester, emerging, rebellious to the last to die on the scaffold the following year.¹⁸⁵ His estates were divided among Henry VII's followers. Three of these men, Sir James Blount, who got Stafford's property in Derbyshire and the Honour of Tutbury, Sir Humphrey Stanley, who was granted Chebsey-by-Eccleshall, and Sir Gilbert Talbot to whom came Grafton itself.¹⁸⁶ Perhaps significantly, this trio was to be a mainstay of Tudor power in the north Midlands through the troubled early years of Henry VII's reign.

1485-1500

To the victor the spoils. At Bosworth Henry Tudor won the crown of England and it would not be unfair to add that their participation at that battle won for Sir Humphrey Stanley and Sir James Blount the 'rule' of Staffordshire, at a time when magnate leadership in the county was at a premium. At the beginning of Henry VII's reign the indigenous nobility of Staffordshire were weak and disarrayed. The Staffords were in the midst of yet another minority. Lord Ferrers of Chartley had died fighting for Richard III and Audley was out of favour, having been Richard's treasurer. Dudley, having lost his eldest son in 1483, was in extreme old age.

Stanley and Blount had been among Hastings' retainers and, although they were both younger sons, were the effective heads of leading county families whose power and support Henry VII sought to harness and foster. Both Stanley and Blount outshone their elder brothers. Stanley was his father's favourite and only executor. Perhaps old Sir John Stanley of Elford saw in Humphrey the forcefulness of character needed to protect his own will and the family interests. Humphrey was certainly dominant and in the early 1490s secured an arbitration settlement from Sir William Stanley, the Lord Chamberlain in which he took over the manors of Pipe and Clifton (a goodly proportion of the family inheritance) from his elder half-brother.¹⁸⁷ That Humphrey was able to obtain this land was due to his position as the most powerful gentleman in the county.

Many plums of patronage fell to Stanley after the battle of Bosworth- a situation facilitated by his creation

as one of Henry VII's knights of the body. He was appointed sheriff on 12 September 1485¹⁸⁸ and ten days later replaced Sir Thomas Wortley (Richard III's northern import) as steward of the estates of the Stafford family in the county. These were in the Crown's hands because of the attainder of Henry, duke of Buckingham, in the same way that Walsall had come to Edward IV after the fall of Clarence. Stanley was made steward of Walsall as well.¹⁸⁹ He was also granted a royal annuity of £20 from the issues of Staffordshire on 26 August 1487¹⁹⁰, though even he had difficulty actually getting the cash. By 9 December 1491 the payments were three years in arrears.¹⁹¹ Stanley was also on the county bench from 1485 until his death in 1504, sheriff 1493-4 and knight of the shire in 1491-2, 1495 and probably all the other parliaments called by Henry VII.

Sir James Blount had been retained by Hastings over five years before his elder brother John, Lord Mountjoy—possibly an indication of Hastings' opinion of the brothers' relative competence. John died in 1485 leaving a seven year-old son and Sir James took over the leadership of the Blounts. He was given formal charge of his nephew, the Lord William, in 1488.¹⁹² Like many a younger son, Sir James sought his fortune as a soldier. Having served in the French campaign of 1475, he was appointed captain of Hammes in the following year, which office he filled until 1484 when relieved of it by Richard III following evidence of his conspiring with Henry Tudor. In 1486 he returned to Hammes, this time as lieutenant.¹⁹³ Blount's duties around Calais and his position as a younger son had left him with little opportunity for real advancement in the north Midlands. He

never held a county office in Staffordshire and was taken off the Derbyshire bench on embarking upon his Continental career. Yet in 1485 he was Henry VII's choice as steward of the Honour of Tutbury (with all the concomitant offices associated with that office). This was a testimony to his ability and a reward for services rendered. Henry was insecure and needed men like Blount in control of rich sources of patronage such as the Honour and the potent garrisons at Calais.

Like his predecessor, Henry VII was loath to place the power of the Honour of Tutbury in the hands of a leading magnate. Out of the vicissitudes of the previous three decades had grown the fear that such a lord, coming as he must between the Crown and its tenants, would use the resources thus available to him for personal aggrandisement alone. In appointing an important gentleman instead, Henry could select a man of great ability but with less dangerous ambitions. He wanted a lieutenant rather than an ally.

Henry's determination to ensure that royal lands were primarily areas of royal and not magnate strength is not only seen in the way he kept the stewardship of the Honour of Tutbury out of the hands of the local nobility. He also stamped on any attempt to build from among the inhabitants of the Honour. On 3 July 1489 Hugh Erdeswick, Richard Mynors, James Rolleston, William Dethick, Robert Boughay and Henry Columbell had to give a bond in one hundred marks to abide by the statute concerning livery and maintenance while resident in the Honour and not to serve anyone but the steward.¹⁹⁴ The bond had been inspired by George, earl of Shrewsbury's attempts to extend the Talbot influence into Staffordshire. Talbot liveries had been distributed on 4 September 1488 at Lichfield, and the recipients included

Erdeswick, Mynors and Boughay.¹⁹⁵ Shrewsbury saw in the weakness of the indigenous Staffordshire nobility an opportunity to supplant the Staffords as the leading magnate family in the north Midlands. He had extensive estates in Shropshire and northern Derbyshire, but in Staffordshire, which divided these areas, he held only Alton and its castle in the Peak District. His aim was to construct an affinity stretching across Staffordshire between his areas of strength. He became steward of the Liberty of the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield in Staffordshire and Shropshire on 3 October 1488. When this is linked with the facts that he used Lichfield as the distribution point for his liveries and that other of the liveries included such episcopal estate officers as the Mittons, Harcourts and Thomas Rugeley, it suggests that Shrewsbury chose to work through the established structure of the see in much the same way that Warwick in the 1450s had found it expedient to use already-established kinship networks to build his affinity.

Besides a small number of Lichfield yeomen, Talbot liveries were given to fourteen gentlemen:

Richard Wrottesley	Robert Boughay
William Mitton	Robert Coyney
John Mitton	Richard Mynors
Humphrey Swynnerton	Hugh Erdeswick
John Swynnerton of Isewall	Thomas Charlton of Fulfen
Thomas Harcourt	Thomas Rugeley
John Harcourt	Master John Middleton

As the genealogies in the appendix show, many of these were inter-related: Mitton-Swynnerton-Harcourt and Erdeswick-Coyney. This gave extra structure to the affinity. The gentlemen named above were drawn from all over Staffordshire, but most significant is the contingent from the hitherto-neglected centre and centre-west of the county. The Mittons,

Swynnertons and Coyneys had been part of Humphrey, duke of Buckingham's affinity during the 1440s and 1450s, but had seen their importance in the county community eclipsed with that of the Staffords. How early the gentry of western Staffordshire were drawn into the Talbot circle is difficult to ascertain. However, back in 1465 a raiding party of Staffordshire and Shropshire gentlemen attacked the lands of the Dowager countess Margaret at Whitchurch and Blackmere in Shropshire.¹⁹⁶ The Staffordshire contingent consisted of John Lane, Hugh Peshale, John Delves, William Mitton, Hugh Egerton and John Cotes- in other words Mitton, the Egerton clan and in Cotes the brother-in-law of the long-time Talbot and York servant William Burley. The cause of the raid was presumably the continuing struggle between the two sides of the Talbot family¹⁹⁷, with the Staffordshire men backing the teenaged third Earl of Shrewsbury (Earl George's father) against Margaret and the Lisle branch. The third Earl had been caught distributing liveries in Shropshire in 1468¹⁹⁸, and it may be that it was to the same men or their sons that the fourth Earl gave his liveries twenty years later.

That the highly-favoured Talbots, who had fought for Henry VII at both Bosworth and Stoke, were prevented from expanding their influence into the Honour may be taken as an indication that no-one was to be allowed so to do. Shrewsbury and his uncle, Sir Gilbert Talbot, were regular appointees to public offices, particularly in Shropshire where Sir Gilbert held a position of preeminence similar to that enjoyed by Sir Humphrey Stanley in Staffordshire. Yet, though the Earl was appointed to the Staffordshire bench in 1486, the Talbots were unable to establish any dominance in the county. Earl George did eventually secure the stewardship

of the Honour of Tutbury, but that was not until November 1529¹⁹⁹ - thirty years too late'

The increased links between the Crown and Staffordshire after 1485, as exemplified by Henry VII's choice of stewards for the Honour of Tutbury and his clampdown on retaining, can be seen in a third area- appointments to the royal household. In the previous half-century men from the county had only rarely featured in household lists. When they did, their careers brought them wealth and power. The fortunes of John Hampton, esquire of the body under Henry VI, well illustrate the benefits to be derived from personal contact with the king. Yet, although Thomas Everdon was sometime cofferer of the household, Thomas Arblaster became a royal henchman in November 1454²⁰⁰, and William Hexstall was a clerk of the household from 1441 to 1451, Hampton was the only important household figure from Staffordshire before 1461. Under Edward IV Sir Henry Ferrers became steward of the household and an esquire of the body, but he soon severed his links with Staffordshire. John Acton, Edward Burton (who moved into the county to take over the Lane of Bentley inheritance around 1478) and John Harcourt all benefited from a household position. Harcourt's name is forever linked to a letter of 9 June 1479 to him from the King, which rebuked him for failing to deliver £150 to the Serjeant of the Catery 'for the provision of oxen to have been made for our houshoulde at the farre of Coventree' and concluding with a personal message in the King's own hand 'John wee pray you faile not this our writinge to be accomplished.'²⁰¹ John Delves had been treasurer of the household in the Readeption, but it was not until Henry VII's reign that Staffordshire men began to figure in any real numbers in the royal household.

Under Henry VII William Chetwynd became an usher of the chamber, along with Nicholas Kniveton, who was also an esquire of the body by 28 October 1488. As befitted such a close household man Kniveton, who had been lieutenant of Kinver forest under Edward IV, picked up several lucrative grants from Henry²⁰², including the receivership of the Duchy of Lancaster's Honour of Tickhill (Yorkshire) in 1486. Other local esquires and knights of the body were Lewis Bagot, Sir Reginald Bray, Sir John Ferrers of Tamworth, Sir John Savage the younger, Sir Robert Harcourt the younger, Sir Henry Willoughby, Sir Humphrey Stanley, Sir William Stanley, Sir Gilbert Talbot, Edward Blount and Richard III's sheriffs Sir Thomas Wortley and Sir Marmaduke Constable. Talbot, Bray, Savage were also knights of the Garter.²⁰³

Of these household men Sir Humphrey Stanley (1485-6, 1493-4), Henry Willoughby (1486-7) and Sir Robert Harcourt (1494-5) were sheriffs of Staffordshire before 1500. Blount and Talbot were sheriffs in Shropshire in this period, as were Kniveton and Willoughby for Derbyshire and Savage for Worcestershire. In addition to these household men, it should be noted that John Savage's brother-in-law, Roger Draycote (another former Hastings retainer) was sheriff of Staffordshire in 1491-2 and Draycote's son was sheriff too in 1496-7. Savage was part of the Stanley affinity and, though his family held land around Rushton Spencer in the extreme north of Staffordshire, their activities were almost completely confined to Cheshire. John Savage the elder had been the Stafford family's steward of Macclesfield in 1460 with extraordinary autonomy to lease all the property under his authority.²⁰⁴ The Savages had grown greatly in power

and wealth by 1485²⁰⁵, but it was under Henry VII that they really prospered. John the younger, who was to die during the siege of Boulogne 'while riding foolishly under the town walls'²⁰⁶, was granted a large part of the estates of Richard III's supporters John, Lord Zouche and Francis, Lord Lovel on 7 March 1486 and two years later was favoured with stewardships in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire.²⁰⁷ He was basically a soldier and served on the Staffordshire commission of muster for the Brittany campaign in 1488 and may well have been a knight of the shire in 1487 and 1489; his brother Humphrey certainly sat in 1491 as did his son for Worcestershire (where John the younger himself was sheriff). Besides being royal favourites, the Savages were closely tied in with their local kinsmen the Lords Stanley, now earls of Derby, and Thomas, earl of Derby, like the Talbots, saw Staffordshire as an area ripe for expansion into.

Derby was constable of England under Richard III and Henry VII and steward of the northern parts of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1485. On 7 October 1485 he was also appointed steward and parker of Sutton chase in southern Staffordshire, which had been part of the old Beauchamp/Neville inheritance falling to Clarence. Derby was appointed to the Staffordshire bench and the 1496 commission of array, but to none of the other commissions in the county.

Besides Shrewsbury and Derby, the noble contingent on the commission of the peace after the battle of Bosworth consisted of the aged John, Lord Dudley and Bishop Halse of Coventry and Lichfield. When they died, in 1487 and 1490 respectively, their successors, Edward, Lord Dudley and Bishops Smith and Arundel took over their seats on the bench. Smith, who moved on to the see of Lincoln in 1496, actually

remained on the Staffordshire bench even after his translation away from Coventry and Lichfield. Smith was a close councillor of Henry VII, Lord President of Wales and on the council of Star Chamber- yet another indication of the close attention that Henry Tudor was paying to Staffordshire as compared with that given the county by his predecessors. This can also be seen in the addition of Prince Arthur and the King's uncle Jasper, duke of Bedford to the Staffordshire bench in 1493. The Archbishop of Canterbury too was appointed in that year. Never had so many important royal and court dignitaries been associated with the county, though neither coronet nor mitre graced the draughty halls where the quarterly sessions were held.

This inclusion of so many distant dignitaries contrasted with and was perhaps conditioned by the failings of the local nobility. As mentioned earlier, the Staffords and Blounts were undergoing minorities, while the Tuchets and Ferrers' were in disgrace for their support of the loser at Bosworth. John, Lord Ferrers of Chartley was pardoned by Henry VII and not deprived of his inheritance; for which good fortune he doubtlessly had cause to light candles on his mother's tomb for the kindness she had shown to Henry Tudor as a youngster under her charge.²⁰⁸ However, like his father, John never held any office in Staffordshire. Neither did James Tucket, who succeeded his father as Lord Audley in 1490, while Edward, duke of Buckingham, who had livery of his inheritance in 1494²⁰⁹ and custody of his entire estates in 1498 following the death of his mother²¹⁰, was omitted from three commissions of the peace until finally appointed in 1503. As his father had found with Edward IV, it soon became clear to Duke Edward that there was no royal haste to restore power

to the Stafford family. Even Edward, Lord Dudley, who succeeded his grandfather in 1487 and was immediately appointed to the Staffordshire bench and afforded a regular place on county commissions, was nothing like the force in local or national politics that his predecessor had been. It was Edward's first cousin Edmund Dudley who took over their grandfather's mantle proper- and Edmund had little or nothing to do with Staffordshire.²¹¹ However, in his confession of wrong-doings made at the beginning of Henry VIII's reign Edmund did rue the fact that Edward, Lord Dudley had been made to pay £1000 on a matter which Dr. Harrison suggests was connected with information and indictments in 1505 concerning illegal retaining.²¹² Was Lord Edward, like Derby and Shrewsbury, eyeing with ambition the political opportunities in Staffordshire? If so, he got no 'good kinship' from his cousin. It was Edmund rather than Edward who was the influential royal advisor and councillor to the Staffords.²¹³ In short, the old order of Staffordshire's nobility (Dudley, Ferrers, Stafford and Tuchet) was fading. The effects of this were two-fold. Firstly, as already stated, other noblemen saw advantages to be taken and patronage and influence going a-begging. Secondly, it gave the leading gentry an independence which their virtually-unaided responsibilities for county administration had both earned for them and prepared them for.

The sheriffs for the last fifteen years of the century were men from families with a tradition of serving in county government. All but one (Hugh Peshale 1488-9) had a father who had held a leading county office, usually in Staffordshire. Sir Humphrey Stanley (1485-6, 1493-4), William Harper (1487-8, 1498-9) and Sir Thomas Gresley (1489-90, 1497-8) served twice, and Harper was also escheator in the period (1485-6). By this time there seems to have been a greater enthusiasm among the

local gentry for serving as sheriff. The hazards of holding office still existed. Sheriffs Okeover and Harcourt were fined £6/10s/0d and £10 respectively for jail escapes and non-delivery of prisoners- the money going to line the pockets of yeomen of the crown.²¹⁴ William Harper was 'hardlie dealt wth all' by Edmund Dudley after leaving office in 1503 by having to pay the Crown one hundred marks and give obligations for three hundred more for so-called treasons, felonies and other offences.²¹⁵

Yet there is evidence that the shrievalty was sought by gentlemen. A letter of 10 November 1500 to Sir Robert Plumpton recorded 'Sir Humfrey Stanley labors to be Schereffe in Staffordshire'.²¹⁶ However, he had opponents. George, earl of Shrewsbury for one was taking a more than academic interest in the course of events. The report of a servant of his, Thomas Jekes, dated 3 November, offers a rare insight into the 'pricked lists', which recorded the names of those short-listed for the posts but not chosen.²¹⁷

'My lord in most humble maner I lowly recommend me un to you and accordyng to yor commandement I have spoken with Mr. Haye in mony mater and at the last of hymself he be gan with me for the namyng of shreffes [sic] in Not'shir & derbe ...we talked no thyng of those persons ye wrote of so at length he shaed plenly that no shref shuld be ther but such as shuld content yor mynde and so I put in secretly divers billes of excepcions so that nowe ther be arrayed there iii Sir Rauf Longford, John Ormond & Mr. Such and in Staff shir John of Aston, William Basset Humfrey Oker & Salop John Newport George Manwryng & Richard Charleton in Leiceshir Thomas Hasilrigge, Edward Belknap & Nicholas Malory.'

Aston was the King's eventual choice, with Sir Humphrey Stanley falling by the wayside as one of Shrewsbury's 'excepcions'.²¹⁸ The other two Staffordshire gentlemen in the running, William Basset and Humphrey Okeover, were kinsmen and were also the Earl's neighbours in the Peak District. However, I can find no connection between Shrewsbury and Aston, except a tenuous

link that both men were estate officers for the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield.

As in previous decades, the incidence of kinship among county officers appointed between 1485 and 1500 is noteworthy. Only one sheriff, Henry Willoughby (1486-7) was from outside Staffordshire and even he had connections within the county as a co-heir of the Bergavenny inheritance with John Aston and Sir Richard Bingham.²¹⁹ There were important matrimonial links. That of the Draycotes and Savages has already been dealt with; others included the Harcourt and Wrottesley families within the new Talbot affinity, and the Gresley-Ferrers of Tamworth-Harper clan. John Ferrers, sheriff 1499-1500 was the son-in-law of his predecessor, William Harper, and the nephew of the sheriff before that, Sir Thomas Gresley.

William Harper was the third principal gentry figure in the county (with Blount and Stanley) at this time. He was the eldest son of John Harper of Rushall, who had figured so prominently in the 1440s and 1450s. Both father and son were stewards of the Stafford family's estates in Warwickshire and Staffordshire, learning their craft in estate administration before turning to local government. William was also receiver of the Stafford family's estates in Staffordshire during the later stages of Edward IV's reign.²²⁰ His brother Richard, who eventually moved away from his native county, was also involved in the Stafford family's affairs, being an executor of Duchess Anne and receiver-general from 1485 until his death in 1492. During this period Richard was also receiver-general for the Duchy of Lancaster- a post he obtained due to his family's association with the Staffords and in particular Lady Margaret Beaufort (Duke Henry's mother). Lady Margaret's longtime steward, Reginald Bray, who had been deeply implicated in the plots against Richard III, was rewarded with the

Chancellorship of the Duchy in 1485. Bray was added to the Staffordshire bench in 1493 and with Jasper, duke of Bedford who had married Duke Henry's widow, gave the Stafford family a representation of sorts thereon.

The Harpers were never a wealthy family. According to the inquisition post mortem held after William's death in 1508, his Staffordshire estates were worth only £40 a year.²²¹ Yet ability and fidelity had won for them an importance in county affairs superior to that of far wealthier families. William, like his father, did have fees from his various offices, but these did not make him rich. The only royal grant he ever received was a joint-lease with Thomas Frebody for £30 a year of Clarence's forfeited manors of Walsall and Pattingham (part of the Beauchamp/Neville inheritance) on 18 March 1484.²²² However, even then the lease was lost within four months to the ever-avaricious John, Lord Dudley.²²³ Harper was at the time surveyor of all Clarence's former land in Staffordshire and at Sutton and Erdington in Warwickshire.²²⁴ He knew as much about estate administration as anyone and was thus an obvious and excellent choice as Henry VII's first escheator for Staffordshire and steward of the Warwickshire estates of the Stafford family for Lady Margaret Beaufort and the Crown during the minority of the Duke Edward.

The other escheators in this period, and there were were few, were men of little note- so little that I can only discover anything about one of them. William Fowke of Brewood (1493-4) was a minor gentleman associated with the Lanes of Bentley. He died in office and, as was normal in such cases²²⁵, his account was rendered at the exchequer by a relative. In this case it was Fowke's second son Edward, and Edward then agreed to take over as escheator in his own right, which

he did for the following three years.

During the years now under review there were six parliaments- 1485-6, 1487-8, 1489-90, 1491-2, 1495-6 and 1497. Many of the returns to these from Staffordshire are lost, but it is clear from those which do survive that that Sir Humphrey Stanley was as regular a knight of the shire as had been John Hampton under Henry VI (see appendix 4). Stanley's only known colleague is Humphrey Savage, brother of Sir John Savage the younger (the royal favourite) sheriff in Worcestershire, who returned another of his brothers as a knight of the shire from that county. Humphrey Savage's election resulted from Derby's and royal support, and stands as the only example of an outsider being forced on the county community as a knight of the shire for Staffordshire in the century.

At Newcastle-under-Lyme the dominant figure was still Hugh Egerton. Hugh may have represented the borough at some stage, but there is no direct evidence of this. He may have disliked the thought of travelling to London- not every gentleman was a budding cosmopolitan- preferring instead to send his son John. John Egerton had represented Stafford in the parliament of 1478 and is a likely candidate for borough member for Newcastle in Henry VII's reign, especially since the Egertons were mayors of Newcastle (and therefore ex officio returning officers) in 1490-1, 1495-6, 1497-8 and 1500-1.²²⁶ Unfortunately only one return survives for Newcastle, that for the election of 1491, and there is no Egerton named on that. Those elected were Richard Harper and Richard Blount. Harper was obviously a Duchy of Lancaster nominee, being its receiver-general at the time, while Blount's election can only be explained in terms of the influence of the steward of the Honour of Tutbury, Sir James Blount, whose first cousin

Richard was. Richard Blount had married and moved onto the estates of a Buckinghamshire heiress, Elizabeth Delaford, effectively severing his links with Staffordshire as his father Thomas Blount of Grisby (Lincolnshire) had also done. Richard was to be sheriff and J.P. of Buckinghamshire in the early sixteenth century, and since his attention was obviously so firmly turned away from the north Midlands, it seems likely that Sir James wanted to use the Newcastle seat to secure the election of a placeman upon whose vote he and his own good lord the King could rely. The election of the obscure Richard Pennisby of Burton-on-Trent for Stafford borough to the same parliament smacks of the same policy. Blount's and Henry VII's reasons for so acting were that support was needed to launch a Continental campaign. France and Brittany were uniting and this greatly endangered the security of the south coast of England. The campaign had a special importance for Blount; as one of the leaders of the garrison at Calais, he would be in the front line for any French assault. The impending trouble and the concomitant need for parliamentary and military support may also explain the election of Humphrey Savage for the county at this election. Blount and the Savages indented to serve in the 1492 campaign²²⁷, though the former died just before embarkation.

Other Stafford borough members are William Trussell and Henry Lisle (1487), Richard Harper (1489-90), William Chetwynd (1491-2) and John Ferrers and Humphrey Barbour (1495). Stafford had traditionally been a pocket borough for the Stafford family, and certainly in the elections of Harper and Barbour this was still apparent. Both were the family's estate officers and were second-generation servants for the Staffords. Barbour in particular was well supported, being in addition a local man and also deputy-steward of the family's Staffordshire

property under Sir Humphrey Stanley.²²⁸ Ferrers was William Harper's son-in-law and a kinsman (through his mother) to the ubiquitous Sir Humphrey Stanley. In the 1490s these were qualifications enough to be a likely candidate for county office. William Chetwynd, elected in 1491 with Richard Pennisby, was another estate officer for the Staffords, being their parker for Staffordshire from 1485. He was the somewhat impoverished heir to the Chetwynd of Ingestre inheritance, but never came into this, partly because of the longevity of the widow who held a life-interest in it and partly because he was murdered on Tixall heath in June 1494 by servants of Sir Humphrey Stanley—the affair is dealt with in detail in chapter five. Whose influence gave Chetwynd his seat is uncertain. He was, as just stated, a Stafford family official in a Stafford family pocket borough; but he was also a gentleman Usher of the Chamber to Henry VII at a time when the King was pressing for the election of men likely to follow his lead. Chetwynd was also a son-in-law of Hugh Egerton and from a family of note in his own right. Each of these alone is an adequate explanation for his election and, while attributing his success to a combination of all of these is both glib and unsatisfactory, it is impossible to isolate which factor held most sway in the minds of the electors. This is of course assuming that the electors had much to do with the election. Five years earlier their wishes had been flouted by an unscrupulous sheriff in the county's only example of blatant election rigging in the fifteenth century.²²⁹

The electors of Stafford voted for Sir Hugh Peshale and Henry Lisle in 1486. Peshale was an obvious choice. He was not the Hastings retainer, but had fought at Bosworth for Henry Tudor and been knighted in reward. Lisle on the other hand had no personal connection with Staffordshire, though he

was kinsman to the Mittons through the Middlemore family of Edgbaston (Warwickshire). It was in that county that his estates lay and he was actually sheriff there at the time of the disputed Stafford borough election. However, when the Staffordshire sheriff Henry Willoughby of Wollaton (Notts.) came to alter the election return and insert the name of William Trussell therein, it was the local man Peshale and not the 'interloper' Lisle who was ousted. Trussell had been granted the balliwick of the Staffords' Maxstoke estate in north Warwickshire and the keeping of the castle jail there on 15 February 1486 during the minority of Duke Edward²³⁰, so he can be considered one of their estate officials. As such, it would not in the normal course of events be surprising to find him put in as a member for the pocket borough in question; but tampering with returns was never the Stafford way.

It is not clear whether the principal aim of the deceit was to intrude Trussell or exclude Peshale. Peshale reacted by suing Willoughby before the Barons of the Exchequer, claiming a fine of £100 and £40 in damages. However, Peshale, whose career had obviously not been too badly damaged by the slight- he became sheriff of Staffordshire himself on 4 November 1488- died in mid-1489 at which point the suit ceased.

Staffordshire's history alone cannot explain the troubles in 1486; a broader view is needed. This was not the first time Willoughby had caused trouble. In 1477 this extremely rich and aggressive gentleman²³¹ had come to blows with the servants of Edward, viscount Lisle at Weeford-by-Lichfield. Given that Willoughby had no political pretensions in the area, it was probably his unendearing character that led to the trouble. A mysterious skirmish occurred in which somebody called Purefoye (apparently a Lisle man) was killed by Willoughby.²³² Shortly

afterwards Lisle's men, gathered at Drayton Basset 'to the noubre of an hundreth and moo', followed their lord into an ambush of Willoughby at Weeford, where he was hunting. It was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth as the attackers eventually departed having killed one of Willoughby's men and left Willoughby himself badly wounded.²³³ Willoughby was later so to annoy Henry, Lord Grey of Codnor that an assassination attempt was made on him in 1486²³⁴; but by that time the trouble with Lisle had been smoothed over and good relations were soon sealed by a marriage of Willoughby's eldest son to a daughter of Lisle.²³⁵ When Willoughby drew up a will on 2 April 1489 Lisle was named as a supervisor of the executors.²³⁶ Lisle and Willoughby together were a powerful force. In 1489 they retained extensively along the Staffordshire-Warwickshire border (particularly around Drayton Basset)²³⁷ as part of Willoughby's feud with Grey of Codnor.²³⁸ Among those retained were Thomas Trussell and Richard Middlemore- kinsmen to the two eventual M.P.s for Stafford borough in the disputed election of 1486. Here may be the key to Willoughby's alteration of the electoral return, with Peshale's name being removed in favour of someone associated with the sheriff's personal struggles elsewhere in the north Midlands. It was an audacious move and one which succeeded only because of the weakness of Staffordshire's nobility at the time and the political vacuum thus prevailing.

Finally, what of the gentry membership of county commissions? Of the seventeen major commissions issued for Staffordshire between 1485 and 1500, eleven dealt with internal security, including eight commissions of the peace and a special commission of oyer and terminer to deal with riots in Lichfield. On the Staffordshire bench Honour of Tutbury men still predominated, though with the rise of Richard Wrottelsey and William

Wilkes in the south and Sir Hugh Peshale in the west, this was less noticeable than in the 1470s. A balance between lawyers and 'soldier-squires' had emerged, though the hard, regular work was by no means left to the former. From divers references to lawsuits and in whose presence (coram) they were heard, it is clear that, if anything, it was the lawyers who attended the more infrequently. The back-bone of the bench were the Stanley brothers and William Harper. This did not stem from their being the leaders of the county; it was a root cause of their preeminence. Inherited wealth might allow an initial position of prominence to be 'bequeathed', but this could only be maintained by ability and diligence. This was as true at the gentry level as it was among the nobility.

Once again a list of the gentry J.P.s reveals a cross-section of the leading county families. There were no placemen as in the days of Henry VI, though it is difficult to know how to classify some of the lawyers, such as Wilkes and Roger Praers, or an individual like John Blount, who came from a notable family but owed his position to the influence of his kinsman Sir James Blount, the steward of the Honour of Tutbury. Perhaps these were the new placemen; people who looked to gentry kinsmen or neighbours rather than to the nobility for advancement. The Praers family had a history of intimacy with the Stanleys of Elford²³⁹, while soldiers like Sir James Blount needed reliable allies and officials at home to look after their interests; and the most reliable people of all were kinsmen.

Viewing the end of the fifteenth century as the end of the middle ages is now scorned, but in Staffordshire an end of sorts at this time can be seen. Of the seventeen leading gentry justices of the peace in the period 1485 to 1500 only two (Richard Wrottesley and John Blount) survived to see the accession of Henry VIII. Thereafter there was to be, if not a new age, certainly a completely new generation of officials.

FOOTNOTES

1. See M.C.Carpenter, Political Society in Warwickshire c.1401-72, (Unpublished Cambridge PhD thesis, 1976).
2. For evidence of his diplomatic activities in France, Prussia, Burgundy, Aquitaine and Spain see A.C.Ewald (ed.), 'Calendar of French Rolls Henry VI', Forty-Eighth Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, (London, 1887), pp.337, 347, 375; Ibid., p.381; British Library, Cottonian Mss., Galba B.I fo.152; Public Record Office (cited as PRO), Accounts various, E101/324/14 (for Aquitaine and Spain).
3. For instance see Calendar of Charter Rolls, 5 Henry VI - 8 Henry VIII, (HMSO, 1927), pp.69-70; PRO, Writs and Warrants for Issues of the Exchequer, E404/58/207; Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1441-6, p.281; J.Strachey and others (eds.), Rotuli Parliamentorum, (London, 1767-77), V, p.191; Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1452-61, p.86.
4. In 1445 he was even entrusted with conducting the marriage negotiation for York's son Edward of March and the French princess Madeline- Historical Manuscripts Commission, ninth report, ii, Papers of Mr. Alfred Morrison, p.410b. This should be used in conjunction with C.L.Scofield, The Life and Reign of Edward the Fourth, (London, 1923), I, p.10note4.
5. Wiltshire held Clent, Handsworth and Mere; Warwick held Walsall, Perry Barr, Pattingham and Drayton Basset; the Greys of Ruthin were at Oxley (this later passed to the Dudles); the Greys of Groby were at Wootton-under-Weaver; the Lovells at Yoxall; and the Earls of Oxford at Abnells.
6. M.C.Carpenter, 'The Beauchamp Affinity: a study in Bastard feudalism at work', English Historical Review, XCV (1980), pp.514-32.
7. Notes and Queries, twelfth series, V (1919), p.120.
8. Those retained in the Peak District in this drive were Sir Richard Vernon and John Curzon of Kedleston (October 1440), Ralph Pole (July 1443), Nicholas Longford (1444), Ralph Basset and Henry Bradbourne (October 1444), Richard Bagot (September 1445), John Gresley the younger (1451-2), John Cockayne (August 1453) and William Vernon (August 1454). Hugh Erdeswick the elder and the elder Sir John Gresley had been retained at an earlier time. The now standard work on the Staffords, from which this list has been drawn, is C.Rawcliffe, The Staffords, Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham 1394-1521, (Cambridge, 1978).
9. C.Monro (ed.), Letters of Queen Margaret of Anjou and Bishop Beckett and others, Camden Society, LXXVI (1863), pp.139-40. Bate did not get the appointment, which went instead to Thomas Littleton. Littleton had married the widow of Sir Philip Chetwynd, Joan, a daughter of William Burley.

10. Other Stafford men in Cannock forest offices at this time included Thomas Arblaster as keeper of herbage and pannage 1439-46 and Humphrey, son of Robert Whitgreve 1446-c.1451; the Aston family were hereditary masters of game and rule; while Thomas Swynnerton of Hilton was bailiff and steward there 1431-48. Buckingham was a leading feoffee for Swynnerton- Staffordshire Record Office (cited as SRO), D1790/A/13/56,99 and Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1446-52, pp.127-8.
11. Rotuli Parliamentorum, V, p.409.
12. SRO, D641/1/2/20 m.3^R.
13. SRO, D(W)1721/1/1 fo.150^D.
14. Rotuli Parliamentorum, V, p.181.
15. National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, Peniarth Mss. 280 fo.43^R. This is the so-called Red Book of Caers Castle.
16. Carpenter, Political Society, p199ff.
17. R.Jeffs, The Later Medieval Sheriff and the Royal Household, (Unpublished Oxford D.Phil thesis, 1961), pp.176-7.
18. Very little is known of John Cotton of Hamstall Ridware (died 1478). He married firstly Mary, daughter of Ralph Pole a Derbyshire and Duchy lawyer for the Staffords and subsequently Joan, daughter of Sir Nicholas Fitzherbert, another leading Duchy figure in Derbyshire. His feoffees on his death included a Fitzherbert and a couple of Booths -closely related to the Fitzherberts. Cotton is also found witnessing the division of the Handsacre inheritance in Staffordshire in 1452 between Hugh Davenport and Edmund Vernon, see British Library, Additional Charters 57863.
19. J.S.Davies (ed.), An English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI, Camden Society, LXIV (1856), p.83.
20. R.Somerville, History of The Duchy of Lancaster, (London, 1953), I, p.550. Ellesmere was a royal serjeant and also constable of Launceston castle. He was appointed escheator of Oxfordshire and Berkshire 1453-4, evidently having nothing to do with Staffordshire except to collect his money.
21. Even Richard Brown of Eslingham (Kent), who represented Newcastle-under-Lyme in 1435 and Stafford in 1442 and 1449 and was Buckingham's steward in the Home Counties, cannot be regarded as a total outsider. Brown bought land at Aston-by-Stone and was a marriage broker for his Staffordshire colleague William Hexstall.
22. Garnet was elected in 1447 and was bailiff of Stafford 1459; Ashby was member in the first parliament of 1449 and was part of an arbitration panel with the Erdeswicks and the Duchess of Buckingham's chaplain in 1451-H.L.E. Garbett, 'Calendar of Early Charters etc., in the possession of Lord Hatherton', Collections for a History of Staffordshire (cited as SHC), William Salt Archaeological Society, 1928, no.24; Preston, elected 1426 and 1449-50, was

attorney for Sir Philip Chetwynd, and his son Philip was in Anne, of Buckingham's household; Atkinson was elected in 1447.

23. The only activity on a local commission of a bishop of Coventry and Lichfield I can find evidence for is a return made by Bishop Heyworth and Sir Roger Aston in May 1442, reporting that they could find nobody in Staffordshire willing to loan the Crown any money- PRO, Miscellanea of the Exchequer, E163/7/24.
24. PRO, Subsidy Rolls, E179/177/55. The commissioners at the inquiry at Stafford were John Harper, the sheriff William Mitton and the unappointed William Cumberford; while at Wolverhampton they were Harper, Cumberford and Robert Whitgreve.
25. For the appointment see Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1422-29, p.542. See also PRO, Sheriffs' accounts etc., E101/41/32, 33 mm.1,2.
26. Calendar of Close Rolls, 1435-41, p.130.
27. A.J.Pollard, The family of Talbot, Lords Talbot and Earls of Shrewsbury in the Fifteenth Century, (Unpublished Bristol PhD thesis, 1968), p.309. Pollard calls Harper 'an independent professional', which I think excessive.
28. Somerville, op.cit., I, p.543; Sir H.Nichols, Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England, (London, 1834-7), Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1422-29, p.286.
29. Rawcliffe, op.cit., pp.80-1.
30. SRO, D(W)1721/1/11 fo.124^D.
31. Glamorgan Record Office, D/DC M/45 m.9; G.Wrottesley, 'The Chetwynd Cartulary', SHC, XII (1891), p.313; Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1436-41, p.428; Ibid., 1441-46, p.335.
32. D.A.L.Morgan, 'The King's Affinity in the Polity of Yorkist England', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, fifth series XXIII (1973), p.4.
33. G.Wrottesley, 'Extracts from the Plea Rolls of the Reign of Henry VI', SHC, new series III (1900), p.186.
34. F.Devon, Issues of the Exchequer, Henry III to Henry VI, (London, 1837), p.443; PRO, Writs and Warrants for Issues of the Exchequer, E404/61/240; PRO, E404/62/203 (wrongly filed under 24 Henry VI); PRO, E404/66/183. These show instances of Hampton's activities at court and his personal service to the King. An endorsement to PRO, Ancient Petitions, SC8/117/5836 records that Hampton served Henry V as well as Henry VI, and was by May 1450 'greth strocken with age'. I think this must refer to his appointments in Kinver forest from 1413 onwards (see the next chapter for full details), as I can find no other evidence of his serving anyone that young in his life. It may be pertinent to add that the petition in question was yet another attempt to get something out of Henry VI.
35. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1436-41, pp. 25, 104. In 1438 Hampton and Everdon backed Robert Oliver in his successful attempt to get the farm of the subsidy and alnage in Staffordshire. Hampton shared a similar grant

for Northamptonshire and Rutland in 1444- Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1437-45, pp.37, 281.

36. Carpenter, Political Society, p.223ff.
37. SRO, D641/1/2/56 m.8^R.
38. PRO, E404/52/11.
39. SRO, D641/1/2/56 m.8^R.
40. PRO, King's Bench Ancient Indictments, KB9/270/56. See also R.A.Griffiths, The Hazards of Civil War: the Mountfort family and the Wars of the Roses', Midland History, V (1980), pp.1-19.
41. National Library of Wales, Peniarth Mss. 280 fo.21^R.
42. Wrotesley, Plea Rolls- Henry VI, p.207.
43. SRO, D(W)1721/3/256, p.73.
44. National Library of Wales, Peniarth Mss. 280 fo.40^D.
45. F.Madan, 'The Gresleys of Drakelow', SHC, new series I (1898), pp.57-8; L.Morsbach, Mittelenglische Original Urkunden von der Chaucerzeit bis zur Mitte des XV Jahrhunderts, (Heidelberg, 1923), pp.49-53.
46. C.F.Richmond, 'Fauconberg's Kentish Rising of 1470', English Historical Review, LXXXV (1970), p.692.
47. SRO, D641/1/2/57 m.9^R.
48. M.D.Harris (ed.), The Coventry Leet Book, Early English Text Society, (London, 1907-13), I, pp.263-4.
49. PRO, E404/68/97.
50. For example, SRO, D641/1/2/22 m.4^R; SRO, D641/1/2/59 m.11^R; SRO, D641/1/2/62 m.12^R.
51. SRO, D641/1/2/59 m.7^D.
52. Thomas Blount was married to Margaret Gresley, sister of Sir John the elder. The two families appear regularly together in incidents and in each other's land deeds, e.g. Calendar of Close Rolls, 1447-54, p.190; Derbyshire Record Office, D231M/E482 and D410M/15/654; I.H. Jeayes, Descriptive Catalogue of Derbyshire Charters, (London & Derby, 1906), no.1393.
53. PRO, KB9/12/1, 2. These files refer to the commission of enquiry into the affair, which sat from July to September 1454.
54. For example, SRO, D(W)1721/1/1 fo.52^D; Derbyshire Record Office, D518M/T73; Leicestershire Record Office 26D/53/192.
55. W.Beamont's paper appears in the Transactions of the Chester Archaeological Society, new series I (1850), pp.81-100; F.R.Twemlow, The Battle of Blore Heath, (Wolverhampton,

1912); A.H.Burne, More Battlefields of England, (London, 1952). See also R.J.Hirons, The Battle of Blore Heath and the Rout at Ludford, (Unpublished Keele B.A. dissertation, 1973) and D.J.Clayton, The Involvement of the Gentry in the Political, Administrative and Judicial Affairs of the County Palatine of Chester 1442-1485, (Unpublished Liverpool PhD thesis, 1980). Dr. Clayton shows that the old notions about Cheshire being deeply divided politically and militarily at this time are wrong. She argues that the county was solidly behind Henry VI.

56. Davies, English Chronicle, p.79.
57. G.L.Harriss & M.A.Harriss (eds.), 'John Benet's Chronicle', Camden Society Miscellany XXIV, Camden Society, fourth series IX (1972), p.223; H.T.Riley (ed.), Registrum Abbatiae Johannis Whethamstede Abbatis Monasterii Sancti Albani, Rolls Series (1872), I, pp.337-8.
58. Rotuli Parliamentorum, V, p.369.
59. Ibid., V, p.370.
60. Figures for Salisbury's army vary from 500 to 4000, and for Audley's from 5000 to 14000. In the parliamentary petition against Thomas, Lord Stanley it was stated that Stanley's proposed force of 2000 would have been outnumbered by Salisbury, so it seems reasonable to assume that the Earl's force was about 3000 men and Audley had three times as many men.
61. Burne, op.cit., p.144.
62. Jean de Waurin, Recueil des Croniques et Anchiennes Istories de la Grant Bretaigne, a present nomme Engleterre, W.Hardy & E.L.Hardy (eds.), Rolls Series (1864-91), V, pp.319-21. An abridged version of this can be found in Twemlow, op.cit., pp. xii-xiii.
63. These three noblemen were with Henry VI's army at the time.
64. Burne, op.cit., p.148.
65. Rotuli Parliamentorum, V, pp.369-70.
66. J.Gairdner (ed.), The Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century, Camden Society, new series XVII (1872), p.204.
67. J.P.Gilson, 'A Defence of the Proscription of the Yorkists in 1459', English Historical Review, XXVI (1911), p.519.
68. H.Ellis (ed.), Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History, comprising the Reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV and Richard III, Camden Society, XXIX (1844), p.103.
69. H.Ellis (ed.), Grafton's Chronicle, (London, 1809), p.660.
70. Davies, English Chronicle, p.80.
71. F.Brie (ed.), The Brut or the Chronicles of England,

Early English Text Society (1906-8), II, p.526. See also H.Ellis (ed.), The New Chronicles of England and France in two parts by Robert Fabyan, (London, 1811), I, p.634.

72. Grafton's Chronicle, I, p.661.
73. Rotuli Parliamentorum, V, p.631.
74. Keele University Library, Tamworth Court Rolls, Henry VI, no.52.
75. Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts relating to English Affairs, existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice and other Libraries of north Italy, (H.M.S.O., 1964), I, p.102.
76. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1461-67, p.112. He died in 1462 and his widow had dower from these properties, the reversion of which dower went, with the other two-thirds of the land, to Warwick's favourite, Sir Walter Wrottesley. Fulk Stafford also received at this time the manors of Cradley and Hagley on the Staffordshire-Worcestershire border, forfeited by James, earl of Wiltshire. On Stafford's death, these passed (dower again excepted) to a royal servant, Thomas Prout and then Sir Walter Wrottesley.
77. W.K.Boyd, 'Staffordshire Suits in the Court of Star Chamber temp. Henry VII and Henry VIII', SHC, new series X (1907), i, pp.79-80.
78. Keele University Library, Tamworth Court Rolls, Edward IV, no. 1.
79. N.Davies (ed.), Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, (Oxford, 1971-6), I, no.321.
80. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1452-61, p.527.
81. G.Wrottesley, 'Extracts from the Plea Rolls, temp. Henry VI and Edward IV', SHC, new series IV (1901), p.156.
82. J.Nichols, The History of the Antiquities of the County of Leicester, (London, 1795-1815), III, p.986*.
83. SRO, D641/1/2/66 m.1^R.
84. Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1461-71, p.151.
85. M.A.Hicks, False, Fleeting, Perjur'd Clarence, (Gloucester, 1980), p.34.
86. Carpenter, Political Society, p.183.
87. G.Wrottesley, The History of the Family of Wrottesley of Wrottesley, (Exeter, 1903), pp.207-09.
88. Ibid., p.219.
89. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1461-67, pp.215, 217, 485.
90. G.Wrottesley, Wrottesley Family, p.221.

91. Ibid., p.224.
92. Other gentry followers of the House of York who were raised to the peerage were William Herbert, William Hastings, John Dinham, Humphrey Stafford of Hoke and of course Walter Devereux.
93. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1461-67, pp.26, 110-11, 227.
94. Wrotesley, Plea Rolls-Henry VI and Edward IV, p.121.
95. Rotuli Parliamentorum, V, p.631.
96. Derbyshire Record Office, D410M/2/87. Warings had been escheator in 1444-5 while Henry Beauchamp, duke of Warwick was steward of the Honour of Tutbury. Warings' family were part of the Beauchamp and Ferrers affinities- Carpenter, Beauchamp Affinity, pp.518 n.3, 530 n.2.
97. SRO, D1790/A/13/56; G.Mander, 'Ancient Deeds preserved at Wodehouse, Wombourne', SHC, 1928, no.166. There is also an interesting link between Warings' wife and the mother of Thomas Swynnerton, in that they are the only two gentlewomen in Staffordshire at this time called Clemence. They may have been related, though I have no direct evidence to prove this.
98. Rawcliffe, op.cit., pp.205, 208, 215.
99. C.Scofield, The Life and Reign of Edward IV, I, p.270.
100. J.C.Wedgwood, 'Staffordshire Members of Parliament', SHC, 1917-8, p.210.
101. Nichols, op.cit., IV, pp.321-5.
102. L.Toulmin Smith, The Itinerary of John Leland, (London, 1907-10), V, p.171.
103. M.A.Hicks, The Career of George Plantagenet Duke of Clarence (1449-1478), (Unpublished Oxford D.Phil thesis, 1974), p.353.
104. Wrotesley, Wrotesley Family, p.220.
105. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1461-67, pp.31, 35.
106. Proceedings of the Privy Council, VI, p.250.
107. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1461-67, p.307.
108. See PRO, KB9/13 for the proceedings of the commission, held at Derby on 27-29 April 1468. Roger Vernon was in trouble on several charges at the time of his death- Wrotesley, Plea Rolls-Henry VI and Edward IV, pp.161, 164, 179.
109. W.H.Dunham, 'Lord Hastings' Indentured Retainers 1461-1483', Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, XXXIX (1955), p.133.
110. Calendar of Close Rolls, 1468-76, pp.25-6.

111. Wingfield was a brother-in-law of John Tiptoft, earl of Worcester, constable of England and steward of the Household (1463-7, 1470). Hastings was chamberlain of the Household.
112. C.D.Ross, Edward IV, (London, 1976), p.119; Hicks, Career of George Plantagenet, p.356.
113. Ross, op.cit., p.309.
114. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1467-77, pp.24-5, 27.
115. Ibid., 1467-77, p.53. See also Calendar of Close Rolls, 1468-76, pp.9-10, 288-9.
116. Devon, Issues of the Exchequer, p.492. Mountjoy agreed to bring 3000 men with him; a measure of his involvement in the campaign.
117. Jeayes, Derbyshire Charters, no.1849.
118. Scofield, op.cit., I, p.501.
119. J.G.Nichols (ed.), 'Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire, 1470', Camden Miscellany volume 1, Camden Society (1847), p.12.
120. Ross, op.cit., p.142.
121. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1467-77, p.219.
122. Ibid., 1467-77, p.207.
123. Ibid., 1467-77, p.210.
124. Ibid., 1467-77, pp.31-2.
125. Ibid., 1467-77, p.211.
126. P.M.Kendall, Warwick the Kingmaker and the Wars of the Roses, (London, 1957), p.270. They were married in December 1470- J.R.Lander, Government and Community: England 1450-1509, (London, 1980), p.262 n.
127. Clayton, op.cit., p.145.
128. Cheshire Recrd Office, DCR 35/14/6.
129. W.Chetwynd, 'Collections for a History of Pirehill Hundred', SHC, new series XII (1909), p.254-5.
130. I am grateful to Dr. Carpenter for directing my attention towards Leicestershire in my search for information about Owdeby. See footnote no.101 to this chapter.
131. Wrottesley, Plea Rolls- Henry VI and Edward IV, p.171 n.2. Praers appears with Cumberford in a marriage contract of 1479 for the Littleton family- William Salt Library, SMS 268, pp.153-4. Praers, Cumberford and Sir John Stanley were also feoffees for William Wynnesbury in 1467- H.L.E. Garbett, 'Calendar of Early Charters etc., in the possession of Lord Hatherton', SHC, 1928, no.18.

132. See last footnote. Praers was also Stanley's under-sheriff in 1468-9 and Stanley arbitrated in June 1466 in a dispute between Praers and one of his customary tenants- British Library, Additional Roll 57840.
133. British Library, Additional Charter 58199.
134. The families did fall out slightly after 1471, due to a long-standing dispute over land at Blithbury which was part of Catherine Gresley's dowry when she married John Cawardyn, but which the Gresleys were loath to hand over- see British Library, Additional Roll 57822.
135. British Library, Lansdowne Mss. 1236 fo.1. Presumably Mountjoy was no longer steward of Clarence's Honours of Tutbury and High Peak by this time; otherwise he should not have needed such a proclamation of protection.
136. C.L.Kingsford, The Stonor Letters and Papers, Camden Society, third series XXIX (1919), nos. 121, 124.
137. PRO, Patent Rolls Supplementary (Pardon Rolls), C67/44 m.8.
138. C.F.Richmond, 'Fauconberg's Kentish Rising of 1471', English Historical Review, LXXXV (1970), p.680; Scofield, op.cit., I, p.591.
139. Hicks, The Career of George Plantagenet, p.397.
140. They had tried unsuccessfully to land at Cromer in Norfolk two days earlier.
141. Historical Manuscripts Commission, twelfth report, appendix, part IV, I (Series 24 vol I), Calendar of the Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Rutland, pp.2-3.
142. Ibid., p.3.
143. Ibid., p.4.
144. Historical Manuscripts Commission, Rutland papers (as above), part IV, IV (Series 24 vol IV), p.188.
145. Rutland papers, I, p.4.
146. Ibid., p.5. This summons was from the King.
147. Anon, The Chronicles of the White Rose of York, (London, 1845), p.47.
148. Wrottesley, Plea Rolls- Henry VI and Edward IV, p.186.
149. Longford was Hastings' retainer- Dunham, op.cit., p.117; Sir John Ferrers' mother was Hastings' sister.
150. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476-85, p.47.
151. Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1471-85, p.2.
152. M.A.Hicks, 'Descent, Partition and Extinction: the "Warwick Inheritance"', Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, LII (1979), p.126.

153. Historical Manuscripts Commission, Series 78, Mss. of R.R.Hastings, I, p.302.
154. British Library, Harleian Mss.433 fo.270 as printed in B.P.Wolffe, The Crown Lands 1461-1536, (London, 1970), pp.131-3.
155. Ibid., p.132.
156. G.E.C[ockayne], Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom, (eds.) V.H.Gibbs and others, (London, 1910-59), VI, p.131; Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1467-77, p.285.
157. J.R.Lander, Government and Community: England 1450-1509, (London, 1980), p.317, 317 n.7.
158. Wroottesley, Plea Rolls- Henry VI and Edward IV, pp.139-40.
159. Ross, op.cit., p.412.
160. Dunham, op.cit., pp.75 n.17, 146-7.
161. Ibid., pp.119-20.
162. Ibid., pp.141-5.
163. Of the four retainers who held an escheatorship in either Staffordshire or a surrounding county (Thomas Chaworth, Notts & Derbys 1461-3; Nicholas Agard, Staffordshire, 1466-7; William Moton, Warwicks & Leics 1467-8; John Mynors, Staffordshire 1471-2), Agard and Moton were retained subsequent to their holding office and, although the dates of retention are unknown for the others, it seems highly likely that they too only became Hastings' men sometime after holding office.
164. Wedgwood, Staffordshire Members of Parliament, p.259.
165. Hicks, The Career of George Plantagenet, p.397.
166. Dunham, op.cit., pp.41-3.
167. Davis, Paston Letters and Papers, I, no.579.
168. R.H.Hilton, Ministers' Accounts of the Warwickshire Estates of the Duke of Clarence 1479-80, Dugdale Society, XXI (1952), p.20. Hugford was Clarence's constable of Warwick and steward of Brailes at the time of the Duke's death. He continued in office through the reign of Richard III before dying in 1485- Wolffe, Crown Lands, p.128.
169. Hicks, False, Fleeting, Perjur'd Clarence, p.215.
170. PRO, Writs and Returns for Elections to Parliament, C219/17/3/114. The electors sealing the election return included John Halse of Heywood (the receiver general) and Richard Rugeley, Ralph Salt, John Harcourt and Richard Norman, all closely connected with the running of the episcopal estates in Staffordshire. See chapter four for more details.

171. T.Stapleton (ed.), Plumpton Correspondence: a series of letters, chiefly domestic, written in the reigns of Edward IV, Richard III, Henry VII and Henry VIII, Camden Society, IV (1839), p.33.
172. C.L.Kingsford, The Stonor Letters and Papers, Camden Society, XXX (1919), no.331.
173. Dunham, op.cit., p.53.
174. Rotuli Parliamentorum, V, pp.156-7.
175. John Whatecroft (1420-2), Humphrey Cotes (1422-4), Humphrey Lowe (1424-6) and John Harper (1428-30).
176. PRO, King's Remembrancer Escheators' Accounts, E136/209/27-8.
177. A Robert Swyneshead was appointed bailiff of the Talbot estates of Cheswarden and in Oxfordshire at Bampton-Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1461-67, pp.420-1. Richard Harcourt was appointed steward of Bampton too. These grants, made in October-November 1473 were valid during the minority of George, fourth earl of Shrewsbury.
178. Somerville, Duchy of Lancaster, I, p.348.
179. J.Sleigh, A History of the Ancient Parish of Leek, second edition (London, 1883), p.126.
180. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476-85, p.415.
181. Ibid., 1476-85, pp.422-5.
182. SRO, D(W)1721/3/38. Parts of the indenture are extremely faded and will be invisible within a very short time, hence my decision to print the document in full.
183. Wrottesley, Wrottesley Family of Wrottesley, pp.192-5, 202-5, 246-8, 251-2; G.Wrottesley, 'Extracts from the Plea Rolls, SHC, new series VI (1903), I, pp.140, 142-3. These references will reveal the nature of the dispute. In the last reference Wilkes' name as Stanley's heir is to be found. The dispute concerned the manors of Aldford, Alderley and Echeles in Cheshire, which the Stanleys had illegally, and as it was to turn out, successfully taken possession of through the heir general of John Arderne (died 1408) to the detriment of the heirs male, the Wrottesleys and Leghs of Adlington. There were four phases of legal activity: 1408, 1432, 1483-91 and 1501. The Stanleys played their final trump card during the last of these when they made the Crown their remainderman for the estates. As things were to turn out, John Stanley the younger did die childless in 1508, his only child having been killed in an accident with (of all things) a tennis ball.
184. Sir H.Ellis (ed.), Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History, comprising the reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV and Richard III, Camden Society, XXIX (1844), p.212.
185. C.H.Williams, 'The Rebellion of Humphrey Stafford in 1486', English Historical Review, XLIII (1928), pp.181-9.

186. For Blount see Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1485-94, p.230 and PRO, Duchy of Lancaster, Entry Books of Decrees and Orders, DL5/3 fo.107^r. For Stanley see S.Erdeswick, A Survey of Staffordshire, (ed.) T.Harwood, (London, 1844), p.124. For Talbot see SRO, D240/J/Add.1.
187. J.Nightingale, A Topographical and Historical Description of the County of Stafford, (London, c1815), p.1111.
188. Stanley's shrieval account starts on 22 August 1485.
189. J.C.Wedgwood, History of Parliament 1439-1509, (London, 1936-8), I (Biographies), p.797.
190. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1485-94, p.193.
191. PRO, E404/81/1. Henry VII ordered that the arrears in Stanley's annuity be taken from the estates of the Griffith family of Wychnor, which were in the Crown's hands because of the minority of Walter Griffith the younger.
192. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1485-94, p.99.
193. Wedgwood, History of Parliament, I, p.84.
194. Calendar of Close Rolls, 1485-1500, p.129.
195. PRO, KB9/379/5.
196. Wrottesley, Plea Rolls- Henry VI and Edward IV, p.138.
197. See A.J.Pollard, The Family of Talbot, pp.53-4, 246.
198. Wrottesley, Plea Rolls- Henry VI and Edward IV, p.157.
199. G.E.C., The Complete Peerage, XI, p.708.
200. Proceedings of the Privy Council, IV, p.224.
201. PRO, Duchy of Lancaster, Miscellanea, DL41/42/4.
202. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1485-94, pp.6, 169; PRO, E404/81/3.
203. S.B.Chrimes, Henry VII, (London, 1972), p.140 note 1. Bray was also a knight of the garter.
204. SRO, D641/1/2/73 m.19^D.
205. Sir John the elder had an annuity from the Crown of forty marks in 1479- Calendar of Close Rolls, 1476-85, p.144. Sir John the younger was a knight of the body for Edward IV and was one of his pall-bearers in 1483. In February 1483 he had received a royal annuity of £40 from the Welsh marches- Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476-85, p.413, which supplemented a similar grant in March 1478 from the forfeited property of George, duke of Clarence- Ibid., 1476-85, p.94. This 1478 grant carried with it the constableness and parkership of Hanley (Worcestershire).
206. D.Hay (ed.), The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil, A.D.1485-1537, Camden Society, LXXIV (1950), p.59.
207. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1485-94, pp.101-2, 204.

208. S.B.Chrimes, 'The Reign of Henry VII', in S.B.Chrimes, C.D.Ross and R.A.Griffiths (eds.), Fifteenth-century England, (Manchester, 1972), p.70.
209. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1494-1509, p.133.
210. Rawcliffe, op.cit., p.129.
211. Edmund Dudley's father John (died 1500) had moved away from Staffordshire to the south coast, being sheriff of Surrey and Sussex in 1484 and marrying a Hampshire heiress- D.M.Brodie, 'Edmund Dudley: Minister of Henry VII', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, fourth series, XV (1932), p.134.
212. C.J.Harrison, 'The Petition of Edmund Dudley', English Historical Review, LXXXVII (1972), pp.88, 93.
213. Rawcliffe, op.cit., p.228.
214. PRO, E404/81/1 and E404/82. These are unsorted boxes.
215. Harrison, op.cit., pp.88, 95.
216. Stapleton, Plumpton Correspondence, p.146.
217. Lambeth Palace Library, Shrewsbury Papers, Mss.695 fo.77.
218. The other sheriffs chosen were Ralph Longford for Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, John Newport for Shropshire and Thomas Hasilridge for Warwickshire and Leicestershire. In each case the man was the first name on the list, as reported to Shrewsbury. Is this significant?
219. T.R.Nash, Collections for a History of Worcestershire, (London, 1781-99), I, p.490.
220. Rawcliffe, op.cit., p.215.
221. Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem- Henry VII, (H.M.S.O., 1898-1955), III, no.459. Rushall itself was worth £26 a year.
222. Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1471-85, p.285.
223. Ibid., 1471-85, pp.298-9.
224. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476-85, p.161.
225. Sir Hugh Peshale, sheriff 1488-9, also died in office. His account was rendered by his widow.
226. T.Pape, Medieval Newcastle-under-Lyme, (Manchester, 1928), chapter XIV.
227. Lists and Indexes of Warrants for Issues 1399-1485, Public Record Office Lists and Indexes, supplementary series ix, vol. 2, Kraus Reprint (New York, 1964), pp.448-51.

228. Rawcliffe, op.cit., p.216.
229. See J.C.Wedgwood, 'Two Staffordshire Elections to Lost Parliaments', SHC, 1928, pp.273-4.
230. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1485-94, p.79.
231. See A.C.Cameron, 'Sir Henry Willoughby of Wollaton', Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire, LXXIV (1970), pp.10-21. Mr. Cameron argues that the dispute with Lisle was in fact with another Grey- Henry, Lord Grey of Codnor (Ibid., p.15 note 6)- but it is clear that Lisle is the man concerned. The skirmish at Weeford Bridge was near to Lisle's land at Drayton Bassett and his interest in Canwell priory- see chapter four.
232. The Itinerary of John Leland, V, p.103.
233. Historical Manuscripts Commission, Series 69 (Middleton Papers), pp.115-7.
234. Cameron, op.cit., p.15.
235. Historical Manuscripts Commission, Middleton Papers, pp.120-1.
236. Ibid., pp.121-2.
237. PRO, KB9/300/41 (1). Those retained were mainly from Warwickshire rather than Staffordshire.
238. A.C.Cameron, 'The Giving of Livery and Retaining in Henry VII's Reign', Renaissance and Modern Studies, XVIII (1974), pp.29-30.
239. See above, footnotes 131-2 and the text which they supplement.

CHAPTER III

FORESTS AND FOREST OFFICIALS

In the fifteenth century a vast acreage of Staffordshire was wooded and a vast acreage was forest. Modern linguistics have blurred the distinction between these two statements, but in the middle ages they were not synonymous. A wood was a geographical description, while the term 'forest' was a legal distinction. The medieval forest was an area of Crown land, preserved for royal use and governed by harsher than normal forest laws. In theory, the major royal use for a forest was as a hunting arena and certainly much of the work of forest officials reflected the need to preserve an ideal habitat for the free-running game and to protect those beasts from all but royal arrows, traps and hunting animals. In practice, however, and especially in Staffordshire, the King might only be seen once in a decade or generation. Thus the major function of the forest was as a source of meat, fish and timber for the royal household or the households of favoured local individuals, and, in the plethora of offices, patronage.

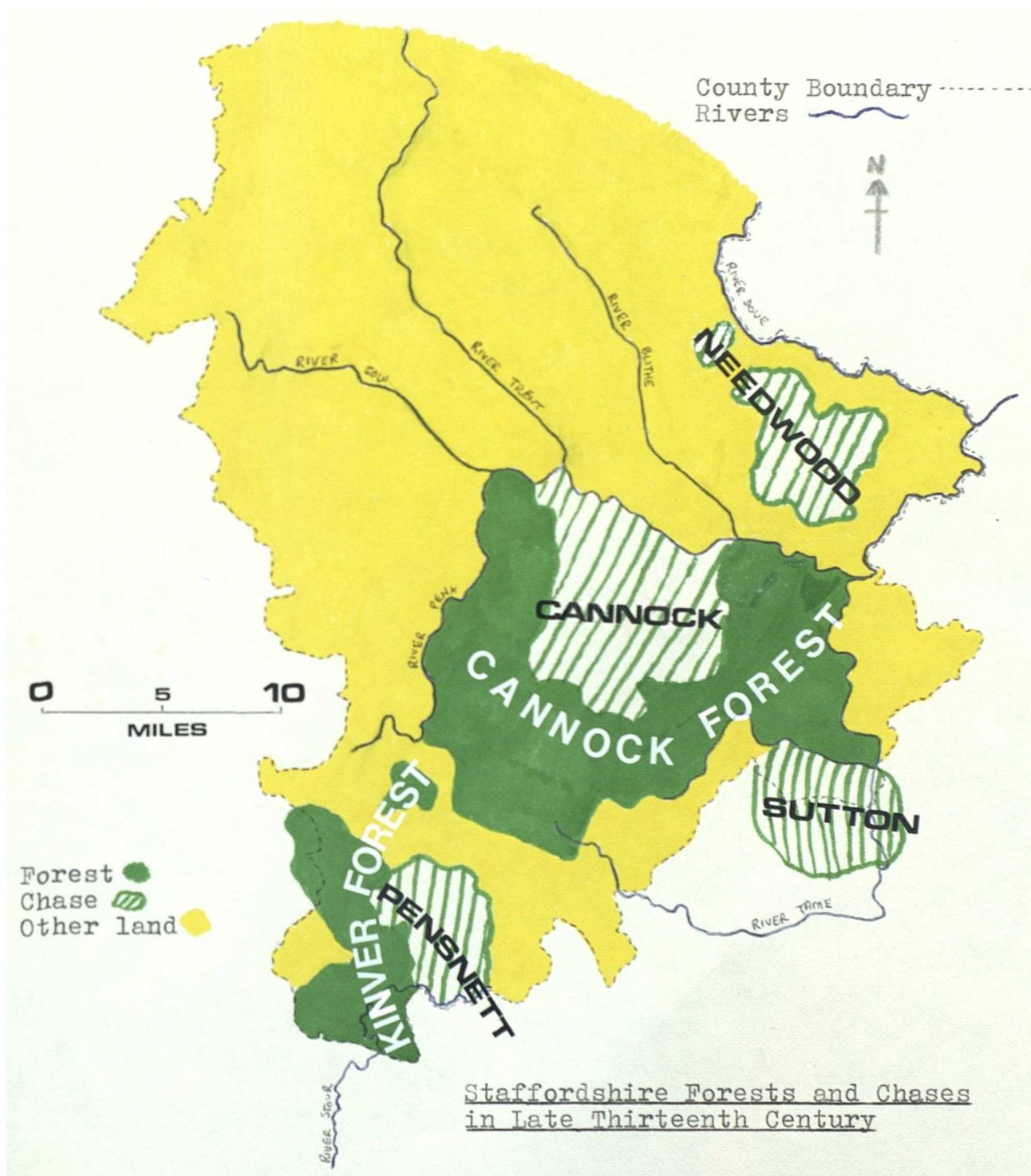
By the fifteenth century much of the forests in Staffordshire of Norman and Angevin times had disappeared. Disafforestation had been a constant aim of towns and villages within the forests, because of the rigours of the forest laws and restrictions on cultivation. In 1204 Brewood forest and much of the New Forest (which stretched like a finger from Stafford to Newcastle-under-Lyme and Tunstall) was disafforested.¹ Moves in the 1220s to revoke this were quietly ignored. In 1277 Edward I ordered that the boundaries of the two remaining forests in the county be committed to writing for the first time and doubtlessly the perambulations of the 'honest and lawful men' who did this resulted in the further reduction of the forest areas.²

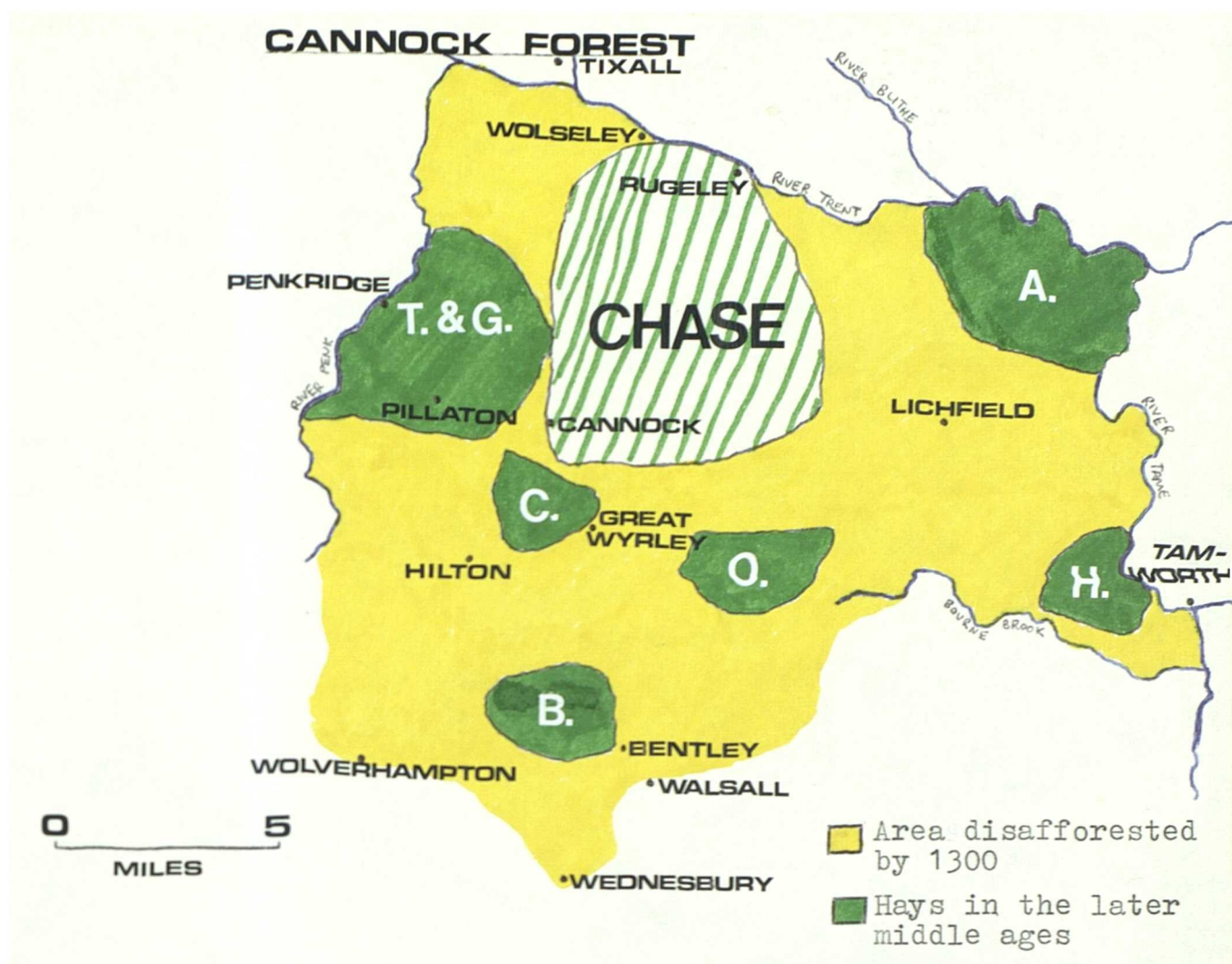
Their returns no longer survive, but would have reflected the encroachments made upon the forests during that thirteenth century and also the desire to escape being included in the forest. Now that the forest boundaries were set down, it would never again be as easy to claim that one's land lay outside the forest.

After 1204 there were only two forests in Staffordshire: Cannock and Kinver. Cannock was bounded by the river Trent on the north, the river Penk on the west, the river Tame on the east, and for much of the south, by Bourne Brook. It was also bisected by the Roman Watling Street, which stood in part as a boundary marker for some of the forest's sub-divisions or hays. Unlike the boundaries of Cannock forest, those of Kinver were not based upon such recognized landmarks, and this may have contributed to its vulnerability to encroachment. It originally spilled over into Shropshire and northern Worcestershire, but by 1300 was almost completely confined to the extreme south-west of Staffordshire.

In addition to these royal forests, there were three private forests or chases: Needwood, Pensnett and Sutton. The first of these was the property of the Earls of Lancaster, becoming Crown land in 1399. Thus, in the fifteenth century it was technically a forest. In earlier ages Needwood, which unlike Cannock and Kinver lay on low-lying ground, had extended as far as the Staffordshire county boundary on the rivers Dove and Tame, and possibly into Derbyshire and Warwickshire. However by the fifteenth century it had shrunk considerably. Pensnett and Sutton chases (with which I do not intend dealing in detail) were held by the Earls of Warwick and the Sutton/Dudley families respectively.

Pensnett lay to the east of ~~Kinver~~ forest. It was bordered on the south by the river Stour. Sutton chase, described by John Leland in the 1530s as 'well deryd'³, lay mainly in north Warwickshire, but crossed the county border around Tamworth and covered a small portion of south-eastern Staffordshire. When Leland also described the area around Lichfield as a forest and a wilderness in Anglo-Saxon times, it seems likely that he was drawing from a folk memory of a few generations rather than any historical evidence surviving from those Dark Ages.





The above diagram reveals the extent of encroachments and disafforestation by the fifteenth century, though Cannock was still the largest of Staffordshire's forests. The forest was divided into seven sub-divisions or hays: Alrewas, Bentley, Cheslyn, Gailey, Hopwas, Ogley and Teddesley. An eighth hay, Rugeley, had been separated from the forest in 1290 to form a chase for the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. This chase had two balliwicks, Trumwyn and Puys (or Rugeley), and was administered by an official known as the rider. He was a minor local gentleman, recruited from the extensive episcopal estates on and around the chase. Further details concerning the rider and the other officials of the bishop are included in the chapter dealing with the Church in Staffordshire. The hays themselves may well have originally been areas into which deer were herded before being hunted. If this were true, it would explain why they remained as

forest long after encroachment and successful pleas for disafforestation had eaten away the rest of Cannock. The close attention that the hays received, their status as part of the inheritance of certain gentry families (to which I will come in a moment) and their very purpose would have deterred attempts to circumvent their forest status.

The erosion of Cannock affected not only the land, but also the offices which derived their existence from it. The duties of such officers as the steward, bailiff and ranger of Cannock forest depended on there being a forest to administer. By the fifteenth century, with Cannock's reduction to a set of isolated hays, these posts had become virtually nominal. Nonetheless, they are worth examining because they explain how certain local gentry families came to hold their estates.

As will be shown repeatedly in Cannock and Kinver forests, many offices therein had estates pertaining to them, held by petty serjeanty. By the fifteenth century a significant change had come about in the emphasis in the relationship between the incumbent gentleman as forest officer and as lord of a forest manor. In the first two and a half centuries after the Norman Conquest the land went with the job; in the second two and a half centuries the job went with the land. Thus, by the fifteenth century whoever held a certain manor was automatically the officer to whose post that manor pertained. This trend, for which I will produce examples in a moment, in concert with the somewhat earlier development of hereditary tenure in property held by serjeanty, resulted in a reduction of the forests' value to the Crown as a source of patronage. This also coincided with the physical reduction in the size and value of the forests due to disafforestation and encroachment.

The stewardship and balliwick of the forest were just two of the offices held in heredit by the fifteenth century. Originally both Rodbaston-by-Penkridge and Great Wyrley were manors pertaining to the stewardship (which office was usually referred to as the forestership, chief forestership or keeper-ship until the fourteenth century).⁴ However, Great Wyrley became detached from the stewardship at some time, and lack of this knowledge has sometimes led to William Peyto, whose family held the manor in the fifteenth century, being wrongly described as forester of Cannock. The stewards/foresters in the later middle ages were in fact the Swynnertons. They also held the balliwick of the forest for much of this time.

Between 1306 and 1448 the stewards and bailiffs of Cannock forest were the Swynnertons of Hilton- a manor two miles west of Great Wyrley. After the death of Thomas Swynnerton in 1448, the offices were divided between his two infant daughters and co-heiresses. The stewardship, after forming part of his widow's dower, passed to the elder girl, while the balliwick formed much of the purparty of the younger. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the sheriff and escheator of Staffordshire in 1449-50 snapped up the marriages of these highly eligible heiresses. The elder girl, Anne, married her kinsman, Humphrey Swynnerton of Swynnerton; the younger one, Alice, was wed to an Oxfordshire associate of Richard, earl of Warwick, Richard Beauf. The offices in question remained with the Beauf and Swynnerton families until the seventeenth century. With the stewardship went a fee of twenty marks and the keeping of four of the seven hays: Alrewas, Gailey, Hopwas and Ogley- making him the wealthiest of the forest officers. However, these families saw little of their offices in the second half of this century.

Richard Beauf died in 1460, leaving a three year-old

son, Humphrey. Humphrey too died comparatively young, in 1485, and left only a one year-old son, John. After Richard's death, Warwick was the most powerful nobleman in the north Midlands and was almost certainly behind Beaufort's widow marrying another of his servants, the Warwickshire administrator William Hugford. The couple had a daughter and so Hugford by the courtesy of England acquired a life interest in the Swynnerton inheritance after Alice's death in 1472. Hugford survived her by twenty years and his step-son by seven. Hugford also acquired young Humphrey's wardship and married him to his niece Joan. The Hugfords, with whom Humphrey Beaufort shared grants of office in 1484 in Warwickshire⁵, probably kept some share of whatever duties and perquisites remained to the stewardship after William Hugford's death, since the Beaufort heir was still a minor then, but the child's wardship eluded them. It went instead to Richard Nanfan.⁶

After the Earl of Warwick's death in 1471 the Hugfords had taken up with Clarence, who inherited the Neville estates and affinity in the Midlands. The family extended, through their Swynnerton inheritance, the influence of both lords into an area of Staffordshire where they had previously not been a noticeable force.

The Swynnertons of Swynnerton also suffered from the courtesy of England. Humphrey Swynnerton, who had married the elder Hilton heiress, died in 1462, leaving an under-aged son and heir and a widow who remarried a neighbouring gentleman, John Mitton. She died in 1470 and Mitton, who had even had a royal appointment of the office of steward in the previous year⁷, remained in that post until his death in 1472. Swynnerton's son, Humphrey the younger, became steward on attaining his majority in 1474- in which year he was also appointed escheator of Staffordshire. He died in 1505.

The Mittons had other interests in Cannock. As mentioned earlier, the bishop's chase was divided into two balliwicks. The Mittons became hereditary bailiffs of one of these, Puys, in the early years of the fifteenth century.⁸ The hereditary bailiffs of the other portion, Trumwyn, were the Salways of Stanford (Worcestershire), who had inherited it in 1399 on the death of Isabella Trumwyn.⁹ They were also hereditary keepers (or foresters in fee) of Cheslyn hay within the forest proper.

The three of Cannock's hays not pertaining to the stewardship were held in heredit by local gentry families. The Salways held Cheslyn (and Trumwyn) until 1518, their leading representative being Humphrey Salway (1411-93), who was the Worcestershire escheator in 1443-4. Humphrey's eldest son, John, was declared insane and initially disinherited.¹⁰ As all of Humphrey's children were the fruit of their parents' middle age, the mental disorders common in children born to parents so old may have been at play here. Humphrey's second son, Thomas, succeeded his father. After Thomas' death in 1513, John, in a period of lucidity recovered his birthright.¹¹

The other two hays, Bentley and Teddesley, were also held by families with extensive interests outside Staffordshire. Bentley was held by the Lane family, lawyers who had originated from Hatton in Cheshire and prospered in the service of the Staffords. Richard Lane bought the manor and hay of Bentley from Thomas Griffith in 1430¹², though it was not until 1454, after his death, that the family got a final quitclaim of their purchase.¹³ The Lanes also acquired other lands within the episcopal manor of Brewood around this time. Bentley hay stayed in their possession until 1748. The word 'possession' is more appropriate than 'keeping' since these foresters in fee regarded their balliwicks as normal landed estates. This was certainly true by the sixteenth century¹⁴, and the sale in 1430 suggests that this attitude prevailed in the fifteenth century as well.

The Crown, however, did not lose all interest in the affairs of the hay and its keepers. In 1477, following the death of Ralph Lane, Edward IV took the Lane inheritance into his keeping (as it was held in chief) owing to the minority of Lane's heir. The King granted it to one of his servants, Edward Burton, who was totally unconnected with Staffordshire.¹⁵ Within a few months of being granted the wardship and marriage of Ralph Lane's son, Burton had married Lane's eligible widow.¹⁶ Burton administrated the Lane inheritance until his charge Richard Lane came of age.

As for Teddesley hay, its hereditary keepers from 1397 to 1502 were the Winnesburys of Pillaton, the bulk of whose property lay in Shropshire. In the latter year the family heiress, Alice, carried her inheritance to her husband Richard Littleton, son of the famous judge Thomas Littleton.¹⁷

In addition to these offices there were the rangership and the highly profitable farm of the perquisites of herbage and pannage. With these there was greater scope for royal patronage. The 'equitator' was the forest's chief gamekeeper. The Latin word may be translated as either 'rider' or 'ranger', but as I have taken the 'equitator' of the bishop's chase to be a rider, I will refer to the royal official as the ranger to avoid confusion. The ranger was occasionally also designated as bowbearer; probably his original ceremonial function whenever the King should choose to hunt there.¹⁸

Unlike the forest officers described earlier, the ranger was a royal appointment open to be used for patronage. From 1446 to 1459 the ranger was Thomas Bate of Pooley, a lawyer and associate of Humphrey, duke of Buckingham. The ranger received wages of sixpence a day (£9/2s/6d a year). Bate had a co-ranger, in the courtier John Bird, until 1452. The next ranger I can find is Roger Pye, who held the post from

1461 to 1468. Pye had been a yeoman of the chamber to Richard, duke of York. He was not a Staffordshire man as his successors were. On 1 June 1468 Sir John and Humphrey Stanley of Elford were granted a life-interest in the office.¹⁹ However, as so often happened, the grant for life meant little more than the other sort of grant- during royal pleasure. During the Readeption, on 20 December 1470, the office was granted to a John Swynnerton.²⁰ He was probably the younger son of the Lancastrian Humphrey Swynnerton of Swynnerton, whose family it will be remembered, held the stewardship and other forest offices. Whether the Stanleys recovered the office on Edward IV's return, for which they fought, I do not know. John Swynnerton died in 1521, and it may be that the lack of references to other appointments to the rangership in the fifteenth century indicates that he retained the post. He was certainly influential enough within his family to persuade his nephew in 1509-10 to lease to him the patrimony at Swynnerton.²¹

The forest's use as a source of patronage can also be seen from the grants made of the farm of herbage and pannage. However, here too there were complications. The foresters in fee of Bentley, Cheslyn and Teddesley in earlier times had generally been granted herbage and pannage as a perquisite or at a minimal farm.²² It was only in the fifteenth century that the financial benefits of these rights were really exploited by the Crown. As the table overleaf shows, there was a steady rise in the farm demanded and readily paid. The farmers were, with the exceptions of John Bernard, William Aleyn and William Smith, Staffordshire gentlemen, usually lawyers and usually from the forest or episcopal chase. Even such an exception as Humphrey Stanley was from a family long associated with the bishops of Coventry and Lichfield. The keeping of the farm was not awarded to a favourite at a negligible sum, but to whoever bid the most. Grants were for a specified period, with the

proviso that if anyone offered more for the farm at a later stage, he would receive it. This frequently happened, and it may be that the system of annual increments on the farm paid to the Crown benefited the farmer as well, since it helped to discourage rivals for this lucrative perquisite.

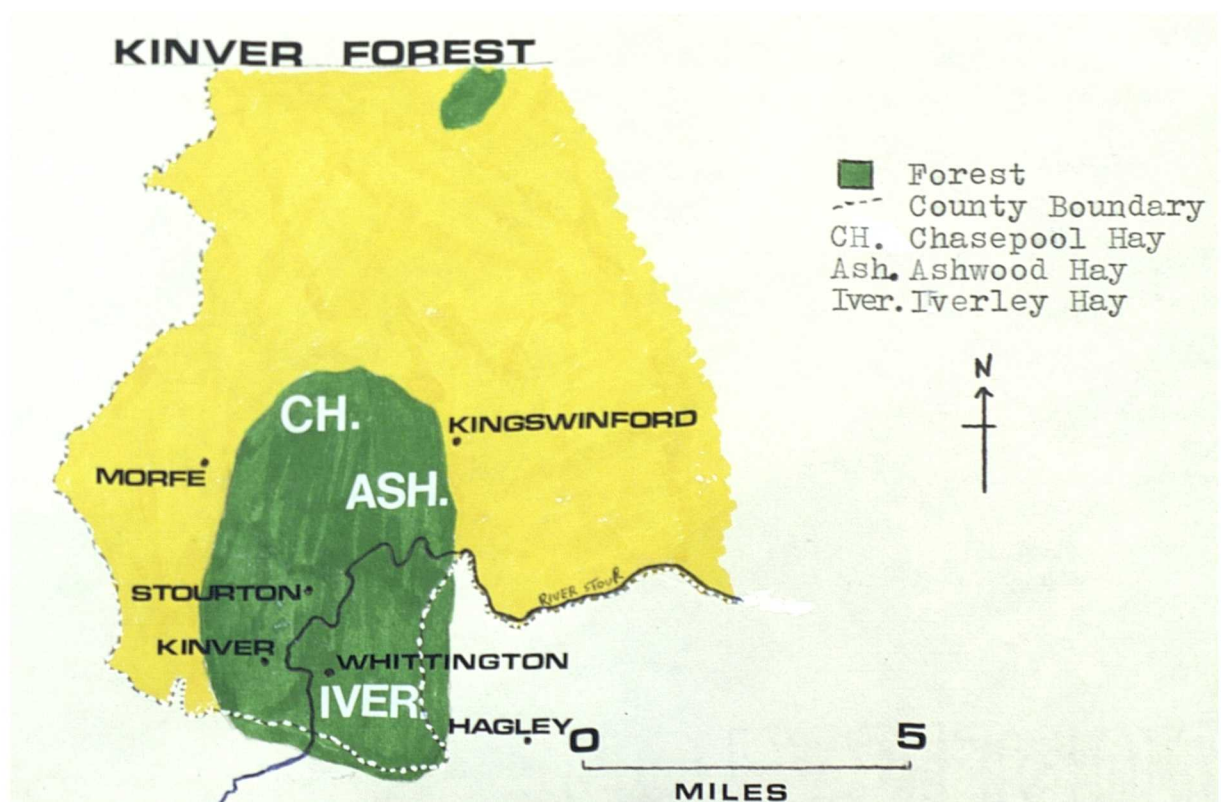
FARMER	DATE	TENURE & ANNUAL FARM	HAYS INCLUDED
Robert Whitgreve	26/6/1423	10 years @ 10s.	- - - - - T
John Swynnerton & John Bernard	11/11/1425	10 years @ ?	A - C G - - -
Will. Leventhorp & William Aleyn	12/12/1429	10 years @ 13s/4d.	A - C G H - -
Thomas Arblaster	30/7/1439	10 years @ 13s/4d.	A B C G H - -
Humph. Whitgreve	22/3/1446	? years @ 23s/4d. + 3d.	A B C G H - T
Ralph Wolseley & Rhys Griffith	22/7/1451	12 years @ 40s.	A B C G H - T
Richard Lockwood	27/2/1456	12 years @ 40s. + 12d.	A B C G H - T
Ralph Wolseley	11/12/1461	10 years @ 40s.	A - C G H O T
William Praers	12/7/1466	7 years @ 40s. + 6s/8d.	A - C G H O T
William Praers	3 /2/1468	12 years @ 46s/8d.	A - C G H O T
John Aston	25/2/1482	20 years @ 46s/8d. + 4d.	A - C G H O T
Humphrey Stanley	5 /5/1482	20 years @ 47s.	A - C G - O T
Humphrey Stanley	20/10/1485	7 years @ 47s. + 20d.	A B C G - O T
William Smith	5 /7/1503	7 years @ 48s/8d. + 20d.	A B C G - O T
Thomas Swynnerton	27/10/1505		A B C G H O T

The most noticeable feature in the table is the absence from many of the grants of any reference to certain hays, for example, Ogley before 1461, Bentley 1461-85 and Hopwas after 1485. It seems likely that these were controlled by the steward. On 28 April 1447 Thomas Swynnerton was confirmed as steward and bailiff and granted herbage and pannage in Ogley hay and the reversion of the same in the other six hays after the end of Humphrey Whitgreve's period of tenure at an annual farm of twenty-four shillings.²³ Had the envisaged reversion occurred, Swynnerton would have monopolised the leading offices of Cannock forest. His death in late 1448 thwarted his plan, but in 1505 his grandson and namesake was able to secure the farm for his family.²⁴

The only other piece of patronage connected with Cannock forest deserving of note was a sale on 4 April 1467 to the Blount and Neville associate and baron of the Exchequer Ralph Wolseley for £100 of the right to fell and sell wood in Hopwas hay.²⁵ Perhaps this was some compensation to Wolseley,

who had lost the farm of herbage and pannage nine months earlier to William Praers. Wolseley was a shrewd and competent individual, so it is clear that there was still a great deal of money to be made from the forest, though by the fifteenth century it was but a shadow of its former self. Meanwhile the chase survived and prospered to give its name to the whole area.

Kinver forest in the extreme south-west of Staffordshire suffered from encroachment and disafforestation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries much as did Cannock. By 1300 Kinver forest consisted of three hays- Ashwood, Chasepool and Iverley- and a detached portion at Tettenhall, sometimes called Kingsley hay. Kinver, like Cannock, was overseen by a steward (otherwise known as the keeper or, in the late fifteenth century, the lieutenant). The stewardship had the manors of Kinver and Stourton pertaining to it and was granted in hereditage to the Hampton family in 1385.²⁶ The office was held at a fee-farm of £9 a year, which between 1427 and 1466 never reached the Crown, as it had been granted to John Hampton (the Lancastrian partisan and Stafford family stalwart). Hampton had received the annuity while heir to this Kinver inheritance and holder of other of the forest's offices, and



after his father's death in 1433 was effectively paying the stewardship's fee-farm to himself. Thereafter the fee-farm was allocated to a member of the royal family, usually the queen.²⁷ Like the stewardship of Cannock, that of Kinver had estates pertaining to it (in this case, Kinver and Stourton manors) and kept those forest hays not granted to hereditary foresters in fee.

In Kinver forest the only forester in fee was that of Ashwood hay. This hay descended through the Prestwood and de Somery families to the Sutton Lords Dudley in the fifteenth century, who, it will be remembered also held a chase on the eastern side of south Staffordshire.

Between them, the Hampton and Sutton/Dudley families held most of the major forest offices in Kinver. The younger John Hampton of Stourton, later to be so powerful and wealthy as a Crown and Stafford family servant, while just heir to the family estates and office of steward of the forest, had been appointed ranger of Kinver and given the keeping of herbage and pannage in 1413. Unlike in Cannock, herbage and pannage in Kinver were kept at no charge to the keeper. However, in 1454, during Richard, duke of York's first protectorate John Hampton was out of favour. John, Lord Dudley and his eldest son Edmund took advantage of the situation to secure the farm of these perquisites by offering forty shillings a year for it.²⁸ On 2 February 1456 Buckingham's receiver for Staffordshire, Roger Draycote, snatched this from the Dudleys with a bid of forty shillings a year plus an annual increment of six shillings and eightpence.²⁹ This can hardly have been a serious offer. The size of the increment was such that within a short time Draycote would have been making a loss on the keepership. The bid must have been sponsored by Buckingham for political reasons.

It took just seventeen days for the Dudley father and son combination to win back the perquisites, with a financially more realistic offer of forty-six shillings and eightpence a year and an annual increment of twentypence.³⁰ This may all have been part of a minor struggle for influence within the forest between Buckingham and Dudley, if so, Dudley won this round; but their rivalry here did not divide their allegiance to Henry VI in national politics. Both men took his side in 1455 at the battle of Saint Albans and in 1459. I will come to the situation over herbage and pannage after 1461 in a moment; but first it is necessary to examine Hampton's other appointment, that of ranger of Kinver forest.

As mentioned earlier, Hampton was granted the rangership in 1413. Over the next twenty-seven years his growing influence at court and with the Staffords, is reflected in his ever-increasingly secure hold on the office. The original grant to him was confirmed in January 1423. In April 1439 this grant, previously only 'during pleasure' was made for life, and in the following year the rangership, like the stewardship (which he had inherited in 1433) was granted to him in tail male. The rangership carried with it at various times other lesser offices and perquisites in the forest. The keeping of herbage and pannage has already been mentioned, but there were also the balliwicks of Chasepool hay from 1388 and Iverley from 1440 to 1484³¹, the last of these being added unto Hampton when his hold on the rangership was made an hereditary one.³²

In 1461 this all changed. Hampton's patrons were either dead or in exile, and his prominent position among the Lancastrian courtiers and esquires of the body made it impossible to maintain his position either in Staffordshire or London. He had lost the lucrative keeping of herbage and

pannage during one period of Yorkist rule and was to lose more during another longer spell, after 1461. Edward IV raised up a minor Worcestershire gentleman, John Acton of Bewdley, for services rendered, preferring him to Hampton's offices. He was granted the stewardship, rangership and the farm of herbage and pannage at an annual farm of merely one mark. He also obtained around this time the hand in marriage of the widow of Robert Grey of Whittington- a gentleman of the forest, former retainer of Buckingham and brother to Edward, Lord Ferrers of Groby. Acton's position under the Yorkists was to be similar to that of Hampton under the Lancastrians. He became an usher of the chamber, where his predecessor had been esquire of the body. He remained loyal to Edward IV in the late 1460s, despite the Neville proclivities of such other leading Yorkists in the area as the Wroottesleys. From 1461 until his death late in 1479, he was the leading figure in the forest, having his grants of office exempted from the 1464 Act of Resumption and in 1478 made for life.³³ The Dudleys had, however, in the meantime- on 19 July 1467- received a grant of the farm of herbage and pannage in the forest at the same rate of one mark per annum as Acton had been paying.³⁴ Thus there is some confusion as to who held this valuable perquisite.

Hampton did, however, cling onto the manors of Kinver and Stourton, though they should have gone to Acton with the stewardship. On Hampton's death in 1472 the manors were farmed out to the Tyrells. The farm and then the land then went to Clarence³⁵- until his fall from grace. The Tyrells were thus keepers of Kinver in one sense, though they were not stewards. The Duchy of Lancaster and Derbyshire esquire, Nicholas Kniveton was lieutenant and steward of Kinver 1477-9. Kniveton was from outside the county and area and owed

whatever offices in Kinver that he actually held to his presence on the 1475 French campaign³⁶, in which he probably served as part of the retinue of William, Lord Hastings, whose retainer he was.³⁷ Strangely, the grant to Kniveton of these offices refer to them as being available for granting out because of the death of John Hampton. But Hampton supposedly lost these offices in 1461. He died in 1472. In view of the conflicting evidence, it seems likely that there was some confusion at the time as to who held the offices.

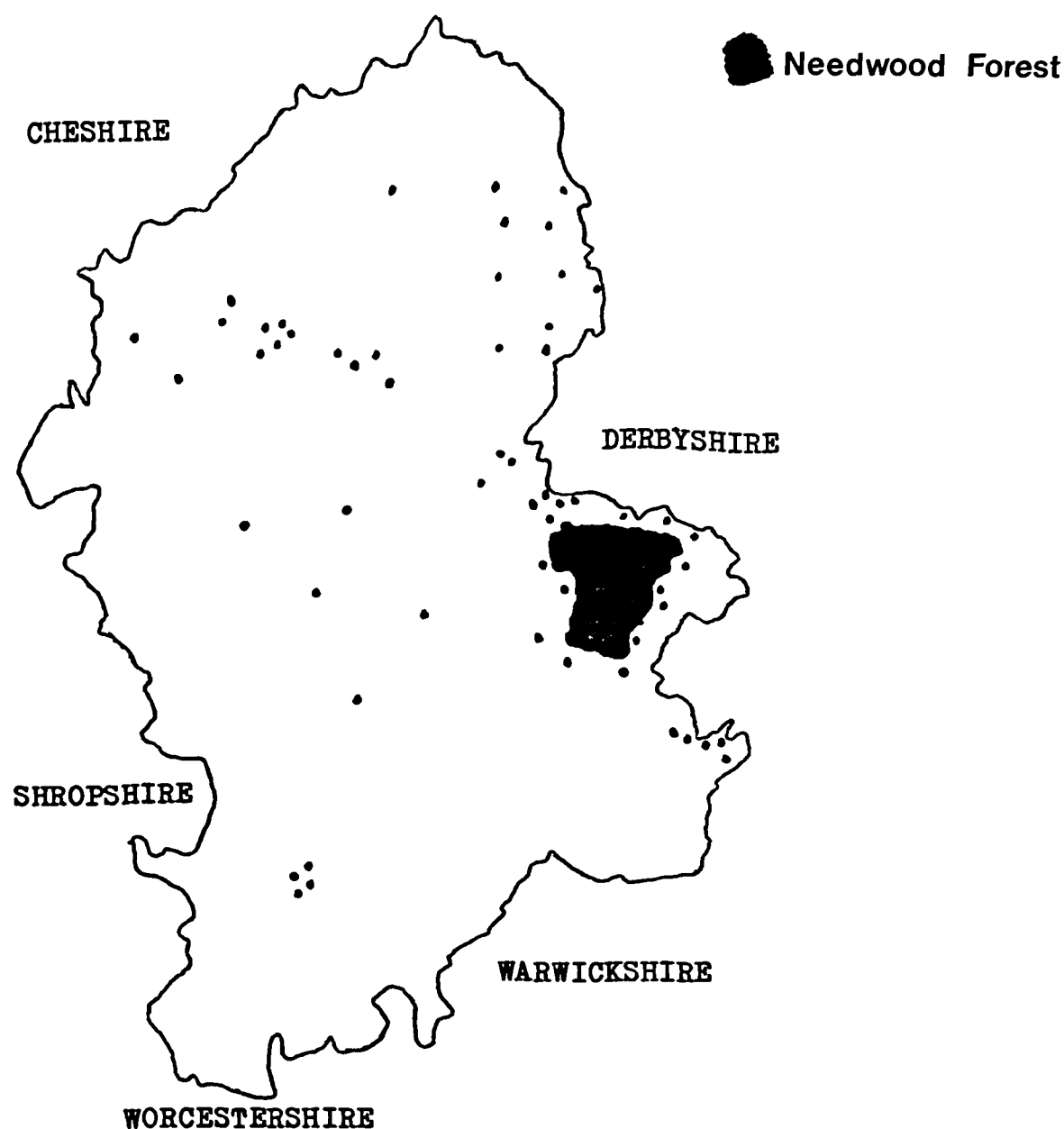
By 1480 all had been resolved. The holding of several major offices by a single individual, giving virtual control of the forest to him, which was developed under John Hampton and John Acton, continued. The steward and ranger of Kinver from 1480 to 1483 was Hugh Molle, and from 1483 to 1484 Thomas Stafford. Both were men of little note, in fact I can discover nothing about either. Certainly they were not part of the Staffordshire gentry. Stafford may possibly have had some connection with the Staffords of Harvington-by-Kidderminster, but more than that I could not say. What does seem clear is that they were something of an interlude between Acton and John, Lord Dudley who was sweetened by Richard III in 1484 with a grant of the offices in an attempt to secure his support. Richard was territorially weak in the area and after the falls from grace of Buckingham and Hastings needed to buy friends. Dudley was also at this time granted Pattingham and Walsall, both of which had been part of the Neville inheritance which Clarence had secured until his own downfall, and of which Dudley and his son Edmund had been stewards since that downfall.³⁸ In short, the final extension of Dudley power in southern Staffordshire

was due to his outliving the other magnates of the area and surviving with his reputation and influence intact. After Dudley's death in 1487, his grandson and heir Edward took over these offices. Only the balliwick of Iverley hay, which had pertained to the rangership from 1440 onwards, did not come to the Dudleys in 1484. Somehow they managed to keep a hold on the keeping of Chasepool, and, as mentioned earlier they were hereditary keepers of Ashwood.

Cannock and Kinver forests were never great pools of patronage into which a king might fish to provide succour for his associates; there were likelier prospects elsewhere in the area. In 1453 John Boterell, yeoman of the chamber and king's serjeant, was promised the stewardship of Morfe forest with its hays of Bentley and Shirlet after the death of the then-holder John Hampton.³⁹ Boterell was not a Staffordshire man, nor were Richard Staple or John Dyson, more royal yeomen, to whom came the parkership of Walsall in 1486 and 1505 respectively.⁴⁰ An earlier incumbent, a yeoman of the chamber, Roger Everdon, appointed in June 1446, was a local man from Bushbury. In his case, however, Everdon's appointment was due to a combination of his position as a royal yeoman and his close kinship with John Hampton.⁴¹

The opportunity for using Staffordshire's forests to reward courtiers and local gentry can be seen at its greatest in the Needwood. This forest, as mentioned before, became royal land in 1399 on the accession of Henry, earl of Lancaster to the English throne. It formed part of the Honour of Tutbury in the Duchy of Lancaster. The forest was presided over by a master-forester (alias woodmaster or chief forester), whose office had been annexed to the stewardship of the Honour in the reign of Henry V. Thus whatever patronage the forest afforded pertained to whoever controlled the Honour.

ROYAL PROPERTY WITHIN STAFFORDSHIRE (does not include confiscations)



An economic survey of the Honour of Tutbury in the later middle ages already exists⁴², and I have no room in my thesis to attempt a detailed political survey of the Honour. However, an idea of the structure of offices within that institution is necessary background information to help understand the position of the forest.

The titles, responsibilities and remunerations of the chief officers of the Honour were detailed in a Cowcher book of 1414-5.⁴³ In addition to monetary fees each officer

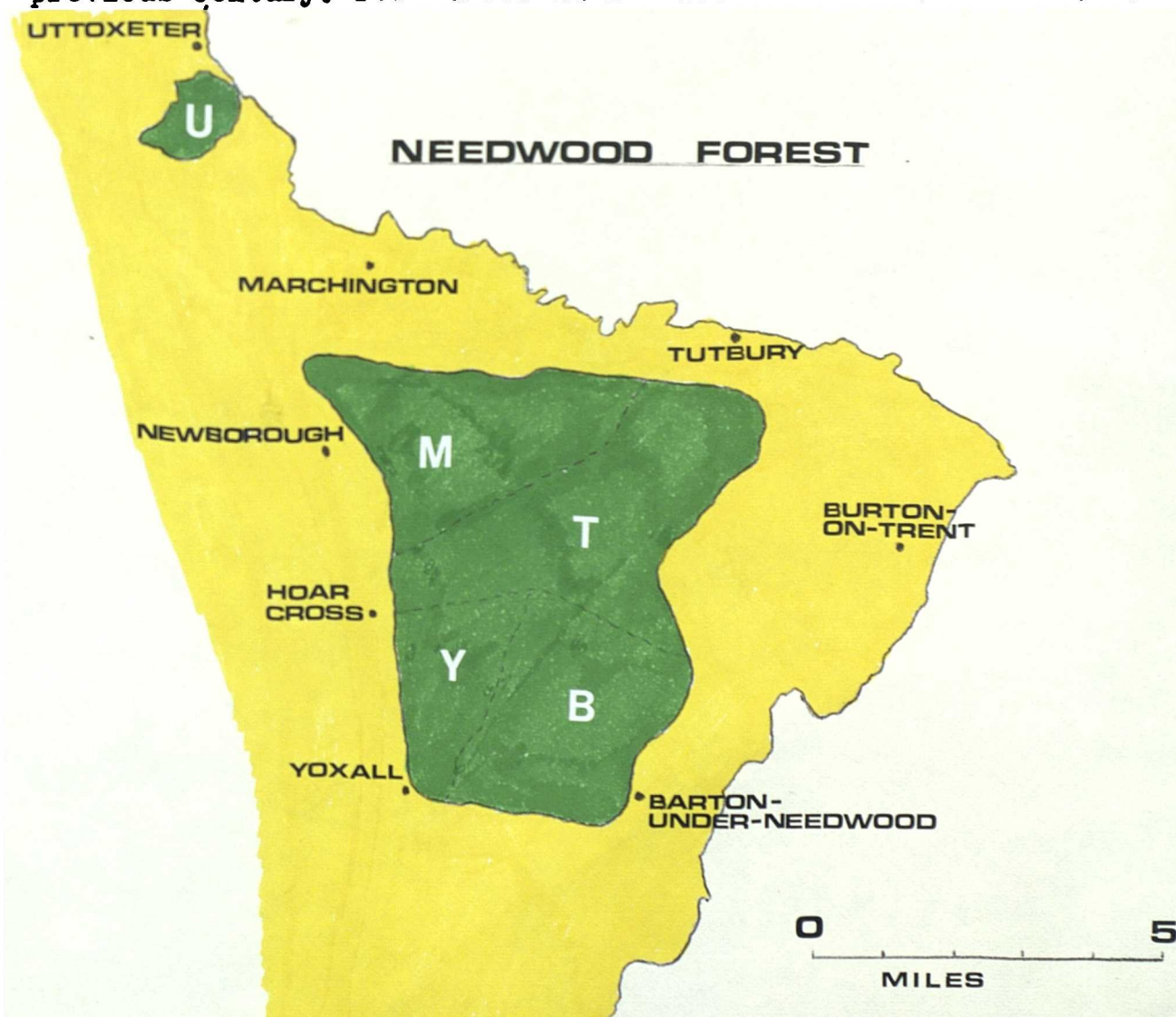
had valuable perquisites, such as allowances for wood, horses or secretarial costs, and sometimes they were entitled to fees from litigants at various stages of the legal processes. None of these petty matters need concern us.

The chief officer was the steward, who had general powers to supervise the running and conservation of the Honour, particularly the administration of justice. He had a fee of £39/12s/6d (later £40) and could employ a deputy, whose fee was to be £1/6s/8d. Besides them, there were an auditor (£10); a surveyor (£8/6s/8d); two receivers, one for Tutbury (£7/6s/8d), the other for Castle Donnington in Leicestershire (£4/13s/4d); a feodary for property held 'in servitio'⁴⁴; bailiffs for the liberties of Staffordshire and Derbyshire, who were to empanel juries and seize the goods and chattels of criminals; custodial officers, such as the constables⁴⁵ and porters⁴⁶; and a whole host of manorial officials.

The forest of Needwood also came under the Honour and possessed its own set of officials under the master-forester. The stewards of the Honour/master-foresters of the forest were important men in their own right, whose power was augmented by these offices. From 1435 to 1483 the master-foresters were Humphrey, duke of Buckingham (1435-60) except for a short period (1444-6) when Henry Beauchamp, duke of Warwick held the post; Richard Neville, earl of Warwick (1461-4); Walter Blount, Lord Mountjoy (1464-72); William, Lord Hastings (1472-83); and Henry, duke of Buckingham (1483). In all these cases the office was granted to a right-hand man of the incumbent monarch. Thereafter the position was held by an important gentleman. Richard III appointed the young Sir Marmaduke Constable (1484-5), while Henry VII's appointees in the fifteenth century were Sir James Blount (1485-92) and Sir Humphrey Stanley (1493-1504)-

powerful local gentlemen whose support had been instrumental in placing him on the throne. After Stanley's death, the master-forester for the rest of Henry Tudor's reign was the courtier William Smith, to whom the farm of herbage and pannage in Cannock had also been granted.

The master-forester was in effect the steward of Needwood, and had under him a set of officials similar to that of the steward of the Honour. There was a deputy-forester and a surveyor. From 1439 to 1461 the surveyor was Stafford's associate Thomas Arblaster of Longdon; thereafter until 1516 it was that ubiquitous nonagenarian John Agard of Foston. The surveyors received an annual fee of £1/10s/4d and were chiefly responsible for seeing that 'the woods bee not wasted nor any [tree] fallen without warrant'.⁴⁷ This was of great concern to the Duchy for there had been over-enthusiastic felling in the previous century. Few trees in Needwood were hewn after 1400.



Many gentry families found wealth and influence in the Honour. Younger sons, like Thomas Cumberford, Henry Ferrers of Tamworth, Richard Hastings and Henry Kynnardsley, carved out successful careers from the plethora of available Duchy posts. Ferrers, for example, was receiver of the Honour from 1461 until at least the late 1470s and found favour at Edward IV's court as well, becoming steward of the Household.

Another individual who derived great influence from his work in the Honour (including the forest) was John Agard of Foston (Derbyshire) and Burton-on-Trent. Agard's family had for generations provided the Honour with a devoted service that ensured that the wheels of its administration kept turning.⁴⁸ He was on most of the commissions in the Honour, supervised the forest administration (literally- he was the supervisor of Needwood), collected rents and farms, delivered summons and so on- in short, he did most things and was seen all over the place keeping an eye on affairs. From 1461 to 1463 he was clerk to the receiver of the Honour, became deputy-receiver in 1476 and receiver ten years later. In 1485 he took over as feodary, and in 1493 he added the surveyorship of the Honour to the one he already held for Needwood forest. Besides the fees from these and the favours which were sent the way of one so powerful, he also had his share of the rich pickings to be had with the forest offices. He was parker of Uttoxeter, held the agistment of several forest parks and the farm of the gypsum deposits at Castlehay. Agard was a rich workhorse, his success coming, as it so often did in the later middle ages, from an amalgam of long-service and competence.

All of this is jumping the gun somewhat. Of what did the forest consist?

Needwood was divided into five sections called wards (not 'hays', as in the other forests): Barton, Marchington, Tutbury, Uttoxeter and Yoxall. Each of these was held by a hereditary forester in fee, about whom little is known. They were probably, respectively, the Griffith, Mynors of Blakenhall, Boughay, Mynors of Uttoxeter and Wells families. Each ward also had a collector/receiver and a keeper to prevent deer from straying. There were also lesser officials, local yeomen and tenants, who administered the ten parks enclosed within these wards.⁴⁹ With the need to end sales of wood and a general reduction in income from feudal rights within the forest⁵⁰, rents and leases of grazing and foraging rights took on an additional financial importance for the Duchy.

Needwood forest was low-lying and possessed a soil derived from Keuper marl, which, though difficult to work, made for excellent pastureland.⁵¹ Income from pasture rights fluctuated quite wildly. In 1427-8 it was £49, in 1460-1 £36, in 1475-6 £46 and in 1482-3 £32.⁵² Leases of land and the use of land were not only an important feature of the forest's economy, they were also valuable pieces of patronage at the disposal of the master-forester/steward and the surveyor. The steward alone could 'sett and lett' improvements and assarts, while his surveyor was empowered to do likewise for farms and demesne land worth up to £20/6s/8d for terms of three to seven years or twenty years. Local gentry families and office-holders took advantage of the opportunity to lease land and rights. In 1462 William Aleyn, the collector of Uttoxeter, leased pasture for twelve years at £9/13s/4d a year, while in 1476 the collector of Barton had the herbage and pannage of three of the forest parks for £5/10s/8d.⁵³ Thomas, Lord Stanley the younger leased some property in the

1460s, while by 1482 the steward, William, Lord Hastings, besides taking a £40 fee, had awarded himself the leases of the agistment in seven of the ten Needwood parks and six more in the Honour's Derbyshire lands.⁵⁴ For these he paid £39/11s/6d or well over half the total receipts from pasture in those places. Hastings was not the only steward to feather his own nest by monopolising the Honour's valuable offices and perquisites- especially those in Needwood forest. In November 1487 Sir James Blount ousted Nicholas Montgomery as farmer of Uttoxeter and Morehead mills⁵⁵, and three months later took over the farms of herbage and pannage again in seven of the forest's parks and five more in Derbyshire. He paid annually £21/13s/4d for the mills and £18/16s/8d for the parks.⁵⁶

At this time the other lucrative farms were also in the hands of local men. The Staffordshire estates of the Honour contained seven mills: two at Tutbury and one^{each} at Marchington, Barton, Uttoxeter, Morehead and Newcastle-under-Lyme (the last being water-driven). When these were farmed out at the beginning of Henry VII's reign four were taken by important members of the county gentry- Nicholas Agard took Marchington for ten years (later extended to twenty) at £2/16s/8d a year; Hugh Egerton took what for him was his local mill at Newcastle-under-Lyme for seven years at £13/6s/8d; and Nicholas Montgomery briefly held Uttoxeter (£8/6s/8d) and Morehead (£13/6s/8d) mills.⁵⁷ Though Montgomery's farm was supposedly for seven years, the steward, Blount, deprived him of it, paying the same rate, in 1487, as just mentioned. After Blount's death Montgomery recovered the farms and later passed them on to his son.⁵⁸ The Montgomerys were also stewards of Uttoxeter, and Hugh Egerton steward of Newcastle-under-Lyme at this time.

Blount's successor, Sir Humphrey Stanley, followed

in the footsteps of his predecessors by quickly taking the farms of herbage and pannage in three Needwood parks- Rowley, Agardsley and Castlehay- and the keeping of Rowley park.⁵⁹ At this time three of the keepers of the Needwood wards were from local gentry families: Agard (Tutbury), Wells (Yoxall) and Kynnardsley (Marchington). The other wards were kept by John Hurste (Uttoxeter) and Robert Legh (Barton). Hurste was also keeper of Tutbury park, and Legh, a yeoman of the Crown, kept Barton park.⁶⁰

Legh was by no means the first royal courtier who was rewarded with an office in the forest. Each keepership and parkership was worth a penny a day (£1/10s/4d a year), and since the offices could be devolved on a deputy, they could be useful additions to a courtier's or gentleman's income, especially if one could get hold of several of them. In Henry Ferrers' account as receiver of the Honour for 1460-1 Marchington ward and four of the forest parks were specifically noted as being kept by servants of the deposed Lancastrian king and queen⁶¹, Rolleston's parker being a clerk of Margaret of Anjou's stables. None of these courtiers kept his office under the Yorkists. Perhaps Ferrers had been instructed to highlight which offices could be readily used by the still insecure new regime to reward past service and induce present and future support without offending anyone who mattered.

Needwood differed from the other royal forests in Staffordshire in its relationship to the Crown; a relationship which gave far greater scope for the use of patronage, particularly as far as out-of-county men were concerned. While Cannock and Kinver contained many offices which were held in hereditary and had suffered greatly from encroachment and disafforestation which reduced the amount of patronage

available to later kings, Needwood, for so long not governed by forest laws, retained a wealth of petty offices which could be used both to develop an affinity among the local gentry and to reward courtiers and servants in government. That neither Buckingham, Warwick nor Clarence could raise a fighting force from among the local gentry beneficiaries of Duchy patronage in the forest and Honour was not due to lack of effort on their part or to mismanagement of that patronage. Besides the Staffordshire lands there were large estates in Derbyshire and lesser ones in Warwickshire and Leicestershire in the Honour- pickings for all. *This may have been the problem*, as gentlemen knew that whichever nobleman held the stewardship would have to turn to them for support and to administer the lands. Thus safe and secure in the knowledge that the life to come would hold enough milk and honey for all but those openly and practically committed to a losing magnate faction, the gentry could afford to pick up what offices and farms they could without worrying about responsibilities to their patron. Perhaps it was a realisation of this by stewards towards the end of the century as well as the employment of gentlemen with no illusions about being able to build affinities for themselves that explains why they began to collect large numbers of the petty offices and perquisites for themselves rather than share them out.

Nonetheless, in 1484, after appointing Sir Marmaduke constable as steward of the Honour and master-forester of Needwood, Richard III sent him precise instructions telling him to stamp out illegal retaining therein.⁶² These instructions also ordered Constable to make a survey of the forest and to pay particular attention to conserving wood and game resources. The King increased the fees of parkers, but forbade them to have the farm of herbage and pannage in their own parks. Here, then,

was another reason why stewards began to accumulate such perks.

Of the hereditary foresters in fee, only the Griffiths were leading county gentlemen. Both Sir John and Walter Griffith were sheriffs in this century and the former was also regularly appointed to commissions dealing with the Honour's affairs.⁶³ The family held 'fayre lands' at Draycote, Tatenhill and Wychnor.

How important these foresters in fee were is uncertain. The Victoria County History of Staffordshire, citing the Great Cowcher of 1414-5, says that 'the running of the forest seems to have been in the hands of this body of men',⁶⁴ though offers no further information about them. The five families I have listed are merely the heirs of the earlier foresters in fee whom the Cowcher mentions. Certainly as far as the accounts of forest officers and the receiver show, it was collectors, keepers and parkers who were more prominent. In the account of Robert Whitgreve, receiver for 1439-40 the keepers of Marchington, Tutbury, Uttoxeter and Yoxall wards (Barton ward is not mentioned) were referred to as the foresters⁶⁵, as were the keepers of Tutbury and Uttoxeter wards in the account for 1460-1.⁶⁶ This may just have been a slip of the pen, but might it also be significant in revealing who ran the wards? Occasionally someone in the five families rose to an important office in the Honour, but this was rare. John Wells became under-steward to Sir James Blount in 1489 and receiver of the Honour twenty years later, and a Mynors of Uttoxeter father and son combination was bailiffs of the New Liberty in Staffordshire throughout the reigns of Henry V and Henry VI.⁶⁷ My impression is that, like the foresters in fee of Cannock and Kinver, those of Needwood were treating whatever property that had originally pertained to their offices as normal landed estates. Indeed, in January 1490 Richard Mynors of Blakenhall actually sued the steward of the Honour for selling a wood in Tatenhill parish that did

not belong to the Honour but to Mynors himself.⁶⁸ Perhaps .
this had been part of some estates held by a forester in fee,
though Mynors was forester of Marchington ward and Tatenhill
lay in the neighbouring Tutbury ward.

FOOTNOTES

1. Victoria County History of Staffordshire, II, p.335.
2. L.M.Cantor, 'The Medieval forests and chases of Staffordshire', North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies, VIII (1968), p.43.
3. L.Toulmin Smith (ed.), The Itinerary of John Leland, (London, 1907-10), V, p.99.
4. Victoria County History of Staffordshire, II, p.339 and Ibid., V, pp.79-80. By the later middle ages Great Wyrley was held at the nominal rent of a barbed arrow to be presented to the King whenever he hunted in Teddesley hay.
5. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476-85, p.502. On 15 November 1484 Beaufort and his father-in-law, John Hugford, shared a grant of the offices of steward of Warwick and constable of Warwick castle during the minority of Clarence's son. Hugford had previously held these offices alone since 1478.
6. Ibid., 1485-94, p.160.
7. F.W.Hackwood, The Chronicles of Cannock Chase, (Lichfield & London, 1903), p.48.
8. Victoria County History of Staffordshire, V, pp.155, 159. The manor of Hagley was held ex officio by the bailiffs of Puys.
9. Hackwood, op.cit., pp.57-8.
10. Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem- Henry VII, (H.M.S.O., 1898-1955), III, no.1123.
11. Victoria County History of Staffordshire, V, p.55. John died in 1518 and the family inheritance was then divided between his three daughters and co-heiresses. However, when the son of Thomas grew up, he challenged this situation. Eventually, in 1568, a settlement was ordered that would make provision for all the Salway claimants.
12. Staffordshire Record Office (cited as SRO), D(W)1474, pp.45, 47. This is a book of early seventeenth-century copies and abstracts of earlier deeds, sometimes referred to as Thomas Lane's Book. Griffith quitclaimed the manor and hay to Richard Lane on 29 April 1430- Ibid., p.17. Lane was later fined twenty marks for having acquired the estate, held in chief, without the requisite royal licence- Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1429-36, p.268.
13. SRO, D(W)1474, p.17.
14. Victoria County History of Staffordshire, II, p.343.
15. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476-85, p.62.
16. They were married by Hilary term 1478- G.Wrottesley, 'Extracts from the Plea Rolls', Collections for a History of Staffordshire (cited as SHC), William Salt Archaeological Society, new series VI (1903), i, p.113.
17. Victoria County History of Staffordshire, V, pp.119, 183.

18. Sometimes the office of bowbearer, however, was held separate from that of the ranger. On 11 September 1471 Thomas Steel, yeoman of the chamber was appointed bowbearer of the seven hays, as John Saperton had held it previously-Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1467-77, p.273.
19. Ibid., 1467-77, p.82; Calendar of Close Rolls, 1461-68, p.2. For Pye's appointment, see Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1461-67, p.27.
20. Ibid., 1467-77, p.233.
21. H.S.Grazebrook, 'An account of the family of Swynnerton of Swynnerton', SHC, VII (1886), ii, p.55.
22. Victoria County History of Staffordshire, II, p.340.
23. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1446-52, pp.55-6.
24. Ibid., 1494-1509, p.417.
25. Ibid., 1467-77, p.12.
26. Victoria County History of Staffordshire, II, p.345.
27. Ibid., II, p.345n.
28. Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1452-61, p.82.
29. Ibid., 1452-61, p.146.
30. Ibid., 1452-61, p.145.
31. Victoria County History of Staffordshire, II, pp.345ff.
32. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1436-41, p.436.
33. J.Strachey and others (eds.), Rotuli Parliamentorum, (London, 1767-77), V, p.540; Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476-85, p.88.
34. Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1461-71, p.206.
35. Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1467-77, pp. 242, 346, 513.
36. Ibid., 1476-85, p.47.
37. W.H.Dunham, 'Lord Hastings' Indentured Retainers', Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, XXXIX (1955), p.119.
38. Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1471-85, pp.298-9; Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476-85, p.137.
39. Ibid., 1452-61, pp.66-7. He never actually came into these offices.
40. Ibid., 1485-94, p.304; Ibid., 1494-1509, p.482.
41. Ibid., 1441-46, p.433.

42. J.R.Birrell, The Honour of Tutbury in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, (Unpublished Birmingham University M.A. thesis, 1962).
43. See Sir O.Mosley, History of the Castle, Priory and Town of Tutbury, (London, 1832), pp.336ff.
44. R.Somerville, History of the Duchy of Lancaster, (London, 1953), I, p.98.
45. The constables and their fees were Tutbury (£3/0s/8d), Castle Donnington (£2), Melbourne (£2/6s/8d) and High Peak (£4). The role of the constable was to arrest those whom they were ordered to by the King, the Chancellor of the Duchy or the Steward of the Honour, receiving 2s/4d for each person so arrested.
46. The porters were just jail-keepers. The porter of Tutbury had fees of fivepence and twopence on the entrance and exit of every prisoner arrested by the constable or fourpence and a penny respectively if the prisoner was merely committed to his charge after a inquisition.
47. Mosley, op.cit., p.353.
48. Birrell thesis, op.cit., p.221.
49. The parks were Barton and Sherholt (administered together), Agardsley, Tutbury, Hanbury, Castlehay, Highlands, Stockley, Rolleston and Rowley.
50. Birrell thesis, op.cit., pp.95-101.
51. Keuper marl and sandstone form the geological basis for the entire central belt of Staffordshire. See the endspiece map in W.B.Smith, Staffordshire, (Cambridge, 1915).
52. The figures are rounded off to the nearest pound. See J.R.Birrell, 'The Forest Economy of the Honour of Tutbury in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries', University of Birmingham Historical Journal, VIII (1962), p.121.
53. Victoria County History of Staffordshire, VI, p.47.
54. Birrell, Forest Economy, p.125.
55. Public Record Office (cited as PRO), Duchy of Lancaster Chancery Rolls, DL37/66 m.2^R.
56. See footnote no.55.
57. Again, see footnote no.55.
58. PRO, DL37/ 3 m.1^R; PRO, DL37/66 m.3^R.
59. PRO, DL37/63 m.2^R; PRO, DL37/66 m.3^R; PRO, Duchy of Lancaster Ministers' Accounts, DL29/405/6488 m.6^R.
60. PRO, DL29/405/6488 mm.4^R, 5^R.
61. PRO, DL29/403/6464 mm.2^R, 3^R.

62. B.P.Wolffe, The Crown Lands 1461-1536, (London, 1970), pp.131-3
63. Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1461-71, pp.98-101; Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1446-52, pp.286, 384; Ibid., 1452-61, pp.406-10, 442; SRO, D(W)1721/3/256, pp.73-7; Sir H.Nicolas, Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England, (London, 1834-7), VI, pp.236-43. As regards their lands, Leland gives an interesting description of the way that the Griffith's principal residence, at Wychnor, was built on very low-lying ground and was 'sore subject to the risings of Trent'- Leland, op.cit., V, p.101.
64. Victoria County History of Staffordshire, II, p.349.
65. PRO, DL29/402/6454 m.6.
66. PRO, DL29/403/6464 mm.2^R, 3^R.
67. Somerville, op.cit., I, pp.540, 544, 548.
68. PRO, Duchy of Lancaster Entry Books of Decrees and Orders, DL5/3 fo.63^R.