

The Illegitimate Children of Edward IV

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The begetting of illegitimate children by kings and nobles was a routine matter during most of the middle ages and indeed until much later. Richard II and the Lancastrian kings were different in that they almost certainly did not father any illegitimate children, but the adult Yorkist kings reverted to type. Indeed, Edward IV has been described as one of the more licentious kings of England. Dominic Mancini and Thomas More both dwell on this, implying that the number of women he seduced was innumerable. However, More only mentions three, without naming them, saying that Edward claimed he had three concubines: 'One the meriest, an other the wiliest, the thirde the holiest harlot in his realme'.¹ Only two illegitimate children have been regularly attributed to him, one less than his brother Richard, who is usually regarded as the more strait laced of the two. In fact it has been commented recently that Edward seems not to have been anything like as promiscuous as chroniclers have said.²

There are indications, however, that Edward's reputation was not entirely ill deserved and that he fathered more than two illegitimate children and possibly as many as five. As is usually the situation we do not know the names of the mothers of these children except in the case of one, Arthur, Viscount Lisle, discussed below. As mentioned already More attributes, without naming them, three mistresses to Edward. This is not exactly chaste behaviour. Buck, who says that Edward was amorous and wanton with many mistresses, names four, Catherine de Claringdon, Elizabeth Wayte (*alias* Lucy), Jane Shore, (actually Elizabeth Shore) usually said to be the witty mistress, and Eleanor Talbot (or Butler), not usually named as a mistress. All of these are well known except Catherine de Claringdon (or Clarendon). This family name is very rare; apart from Sir Richard Clarendon, said by Hutton to have been at Bosworth (but not mentioned in any other source), the only holder known to history is Sir Roger de Clarendon, illegitimate son of Edward the Black Prince. Sir Roger married Margaret Fleming, heiress to the Roche family, but she died very young and without issue. So far as is known Sir Roger did not marry again so that Catherine is presumably not descended from him. She may have been related to the Thomas Clarendon, the yeoman of Cokehill referred to by

¹ Dominic Mancini, *The Usurpation of Richard III*, ed. C.A.J. Armstrong, 1969, p. 61; *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 2, *The History of King Richard III*, ed. R. Sylvester, New Haven and London 1963, p. 56.

² J. Ashdown-Hill, 'The elusive mistress: Elizabeth Lucy and her family', *The Ricardian*, vol. 11, (1997-99), pp. 490-505, esp. 498.

Ashdown-Hill, mentioned in two patent roll references. If this is so it cannot be proved and it seems likely that Catherine was a woman of low status from Clarendon, the royal manor in Oxfordshire.³

However, to return to the results of these liaisons: firstly, the only child who is certainly Edward's is Arthur Plantagenet, Viscount Lisle. His life has recently been described at great length by several authors,⁴ so only brief details are given here. The date of Lisle's birth is not known, it was possibly in the early 1460s, between 1462 and 1464, certainly before 1470⁵ and his mother was almost certainly Elizabeth Lucy, born Wayte, as Lisle was called Arthur Wayte in his youth. He was taken into the household of his half-sister, Elizabeth of York, *circa* 1502 and remained in royal service for the rest of his life. He was created Viscount Lisle in consequence of his marriage to the Lisle heiress in 1523. He died aged about eighty years of age in 1542, just as he was about to be released from the Tower, where he had been imprisoned for nearly two years on a probably false charge of treason by his nephew, Henry VIII. There is no doubt at all that Arthur was a son of Edward IV, his arms were 'England and France quarterly, quartered by Ulster and March, overall a bendlet sinister azure'. These were very similar to the arms of Elizabeth of York, in her case of course without the bendlet signifying bastardy. Lisle's livery colours were the Yorkist murrey and blue and his standard was powdered with the falcon and fetterlock badge charged with a bendlet sinister.⁶ Lisle's mother, Elizabeth Waite, was born about 1445; she was of a Hampshire family and married a Lucy, possibly Sir William Lucy, of the Warwickshire Lucys.⁷ She was probably dead by 1487 and possibly by 1482.

The next illegitimate child to be discussed is Grace. She is established as a child of Edward IV by a reference in a herald's account of the funeral of Elizabeth Woodville where she appears as one of the very few to attend the funeral. She is mentioned as 'Maistres Grace, a bastard dowghter of Kyng Edwarde, and upon [among] an other gentilwomen',⁸ and it seems from this that she was the chief and almost the only mourner from the ladies of the queen. There were only two others present, the queen's chaplain and her cousin Edmund Haute, one of her executors. It thus seems that 'Mistress

³ Sir Richard Clarendon and Margaret Fleming; C. Given-Wilson and A. Curteis, *The Royal Bastards of Medieval England*, Stroud 1984, pp. 143–46; *CP*, vol. 11, p. 44; Ashdown-Hill, 'Mistress', p. 504, n. 20, quoting *CPR, 1446–1452*, pp. 386, 461. F. Sandford, *A Genealogical History of the Kings of England*, London 1707, p. 189, states that Sir Roger de Clarendon is thought to be the ancestor of 'a Family of the Smiths in the County of Essex', but gives no reason for saying this.

⁴ Given-Wilson and Curteis, *Bastards*, pp. 162–73; M. St Claire Byrne, *The Lisle Letters*, 6 vols, Chicago 1981, vol. 1, pp. 137–286; also *CP*, vol. 8, pp. 63–68.

⁵ St Claire Byrne, *Letters*, pp. 141, 144–45; *CP*, vol. 14, p. 443.

⁶ St Claire Byrne, *Letters*, p. 178, frontispiece and plate 7.

⁷ Ashdown-Hill, 'Mistress', pp. 490–91, 497.

⁸ BL Arundel MS 26, f. 29v, Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, 'Royal burials at Windsor, II', see Bibliography under 1999, esp. p. 456.

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Grace' was indeed important, a daughter of Edward IV, conceivably brought up in the household of the queen and presumably recognised by Edward. Her appearance at Elizabeth Woodville's funeral is the sole reference to her existence, nothing further is known about her, neither birth nor death dates nor the name of her mother. It is, of course, possible that she was married or married later but without her husband's name there is no way of searching the records for her.

The last three possible illegitimate children of Edward IV can be grouped together, not because they shared the same mother (so far as is known) but because they all appear in heraldic manuscripts as being married into particular families. These claims are slightly suspicious because saying that one of your family had married at some stage into the royal family, even into a bastard branch, was a way of making the family more important. However, the earliest manuscripts in which the names occur are all Tudor ones and even after the acknowledgement by Henry VIII of his bastard uncle Arthur – thus making Yorkist blood acceptable provided it was illegitimate – it cannot have been very safe to lay claim to such blood. Thus it seems possible that these claims were true.

First, to take them in order of status, is Elizabeth, said to have married Thomas Lumley, son and heir of George, 2nd Lord Lumley. The Lumleys were a Yorkist family and there is nothing unlikely about them being chosen to marry into the Yorkist royal family. Thomas, 1st Lord Lumley, was created a peer by Edward IV in his first parliament and he was present at the coronation of Richard III. George, the second lord, took part in the Scottish expedition of Richard, Duke of Gloucester. George's heir, Thomas, probably died in 1487, before his father; we do not know when he was born, but his own eldest son was born about 1477.⁹ There are many sources stating that Thomas married Elizabeth although to some extent they copy each other. The earliest of them, a manuscript dating from about 1505 and thus virtually contemporary, states that Thomas Lumley 'wedded bastard daughter of Edward IV', but it does not give the daughter a name. This comes from the next source, chronologically speaking, Tonge's *Visitation of the Northern Counties* of about 1530.¹⁰ Given the early source for this marriage it seems likely that it is true and that this Elizabeth is probably another daughter of Edward. It has been suggested that her mother was Elizabeth Lucy and this is possible, but there seems no very definite reason why she should be, as the arguments rest chiefly on the supposed birth dates of Elizabeth and Arthur and to words attributed to Edward IV by Sir Thomas

⁹ *CP*, vol. 8, p. 274.

¹⁰ BL Harl. MS 1074, f. 306, printed in *Collectanea Miscellanea et Genealogica*, vol. 1 (1834), p. 304. This folio is part of a group of pedigrees apparently compiled towards the end of the reign of Henry VII, possibly to show how the king was related to the noble families of his realm. Later sources (incl. Tonge's *Visitation*): *CP*, vol. 14, *Addenda et Corrigenda*, p. 457; the statement there that there were no issue of the marriage is not true.

More which imply that Edward had more than one bastard in 1464.¹¹ The argument also depends on the idea that Edward only had one mistress in the 1460s. In fact, we have no idea how many mistresses he had at any one moment nor real evidence as to when any of these women were his mistresses.

Next in this group is Dame Isabel Mylbery. This name occurs in another heraldic manuscript, this time of about 1510 or just after, where her arms are illustrated. It is a most interesting coat, possibly granted by Sir Thomas Wriothesley, Garter King of Arms, painted on a lozenge for a woman and being 'per bend purpure (or murrey) and azure, in fess a rose between two demi lions passant guardant facing sinister, all argent'. The colours are the livery colours of the house of York, the white rose is of York and the demi lions are reminiscent of the lions of England. In all just the kind of coat that might be invented for the illegitimate daughter of a Yorkist king (even to the lions most unusually facing left) and the manuscript seems to confirm this. The inscription above the coat of arms describes Dame Isabel as *educata ut fert[ur] per R[egem] E[dwardum] iij^{mi}*, 'brought up it is said by King Edward IV'. This could mean what it says, but combined with the coat of arms it seems more likely to be a euphemism for a child of Edward IV, possibly recognised as such by the king. No family of the name Mylbery is known from the middle ages but it could be the name of her mother. Next to the lozenge carrying Isabel's arms is a shield with her arms impaled by the arms of the Audley family differenced by a crescent, and above this it says, on the left (heraldically the right): *Johannes Audeley, frater Jacobi domini de Audeley*, 'John Audley, brother of James, Lord Audley', and on the right, above her arms: *Dame Isabelle uxor eius*, 'Lady Isabel his wife'.¹² This marriage is interesting in view of the later careers of John and his brother. John is a rather obscure member of the Audley family, he seems to have almost entirely dropped out of the pedigrees, although we know that he was indeed of the Audleys of Heleigh, because he is mentioned in the will of Anne, Lady Audley, his mother.¹³ He took part in the Cornish rising of 1497 with his brother and was indicted for a part in the Warbeck conspiracy in 1499. He was eventually pardoned in 1505.¹⁴ The Audleys had long been supporters of the Yorkists, John, Lord Audley, the father of James and John, was highly esteemed by

¹¹ Byrne, *Letters*, p. 140; Ashdown-Hill, 'Mistress', p. 498

¹² London, College of Arms MS Vincent 153, p. 23, described in L. Campbell and F. Steer, eds, *A Catalogue of Manuscripts in the College of Arms*, Collections, vol. 1, London 1988, p. 391. Page 23 of Vincent 153 was probably painted in the early part of the period between 1510 and 1534. Partly illustrated in H. Bedingfield and P. Gwynn-Jones, *Heraldry*, Wigston 1993, p. 62. Also T. Woodcock and J. Martin Robinson, *The Oxford Guide to Heraldry*, Oxford 1988, p. 53. Thanks are due to Lesley Boatwright for advice on the Latin and to Annette Stark for pointing out to me the Bedingfield and Gwynn-Jones illustration.

¹³ PRO, PROB 11/11, Horne, f. 189, thanks are due to Rosemary Horrox for this reference.

¹⁴ I. Arthurson, *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy, 1491-1499*, Stroud 1994, pp. 209, 215.

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Edward IV, it is said. He was present at the coronation of Richard III and made Lord Treasurer in 1484.¹⁵ The Audleys were just the kind of family one of whose members might have married an illegitimate daughter of Edward IV. Nothing more is known about John or his wife or whether they had children or not.

The final child of Edward IV is mentioned in the Kent Visitation of 1574, in the pedigree of Harman, which says that Henry Harman was married to a daughter of Edward IV. The daughter is not named. The Harman arms are described in the printed Visitation as 'a chevron purple between three periwigs sable', although more likely ostrich feathers were meant, 'periwigs' in this sense is a later usage. The crest is described 'out of a ducal coronet an arm erect azure, the hand proper grasping two roses gules and argent, stalked and leaved vert' which sounds like a grant which might be made to a scion of royalty, and the purple (or murrey) chevron might be part of such a grant.¹⁶ There is nothing inherently unlikely in Harman marrying such a woman, as he was an important person, clerk of the crown in the court of King's Bench ('coroner and attorney in the bench before the king' as one of his patents describes him) from 1480 until 1502, being appointed successively by each king as they came to the throne. He died in March 1502 and his will was proved soon after. His will tells us nothing interesting about his wife except that her name was Mary and that they had eleven children, seven sons and four daughters. The names of the children give us no clues about possible royal ancestry. None of the boys was named Edward, for example.¹⁷

It thus appears that Edward IV was probably responsible for five illegitimate children, a fact which, if true, restores his reputation (in a manner of speaking) as the black sheep of the Yorkist dynasty.

¹⁵ *CP*, vol. 1, p. 342.

¹⁶ *The Visitations of Kent, 1574*, Harleian Society, 1923, p. 61. Neither the previous nor subsequent Visitation of Kent contains a pedigree of Harman. The Visitation says that the crest, but not the arms, was given to Harman by Henry VII 'after he had married with E:4 daughter'.

¹⁷ PRO, PROB 11/13 Blamyx, ff. 129-30.