

Antony Wydevile, Lord Scales and Earl Rivers: Family, Friends and Affinity. Part 1.

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The intention of this article is to look at Antony Wydevile and to find out to what extent he was typical of his family and his period. Before considering him as an individual, his family and its position within society will be studied.

The Wydevile family came from the ranks of the lower gentry and has generally been vilified as grasping and opportunistic. Their rise in fortune was due to two marriages, and though they were members of a minor family they dared eventually to reach for the crown. By April 1483 everything that they had worked for appeared to have come to an end. Following Edward IV's death Richard, Duke of Gloucester, outmanoeuvred them in a virtually bloodless coup, which led to the loss of their control of the young king, Edward V. Richard accused them of plotting against him and Antony was arrested and later executed, while Queen Elizabeth fled into sanctuary with her children. Despite the setbacks of 1483, by the end of 1485 a Wydevile child sat on the throne, albeit a woman. Can the career of the Wydeviles therefore be seen as a success story even if this was not the result they had anticipated and worked for?

Looking at the few documents and chronicles that remain, the truth of Lander's observation that 'the political history of the period is a web of shreds and tatters' and that 'observations on characters and motives are (so) few'¹ becomes increasingly apparent. While the questions multiply, the answers seem to be ever elusive. Is it possible to draw any realistic conclusions from the information available?

The first part of this paper will provide the family background, the second will attempt to examine Antony within the context of his family and social group. Was he a 'good lord' to his tenants? Did he exercise his offices with skill? Who were his friends and his enemies? His two marriages and lack of an heir will also be examined. Antony has been seen as an exceptional man, both by some of his contemporaries and by later historians. According to Mancini he was 'always considered a kind, serious, and just man'² whereas Hicks has

¹ J.R. Lander, 'Marriage and politics in the fifteenth century: the Nevilles and the Wydevilles', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 36 (1963), p. 119.

² C.A.J. Armstrong, *The Usurpation of Richard The Third*, London 1936, p. 83.

depicted him as the 'worst of them all'.³ Which is the more accurate view? Was Antony the worst or the best of them? It is hoped that by the end of these papers something of the 'man' may emerge.

The Wydevile story begins two generations earlier, with Antony's grandfather Richard Wydevile, of the Mote in Kent and Grafton in Northamptonshire. His father, John, was a member of the Northamptonshire gentry, who married twice. Richard's mother, Isabel, was John's second wife, thus Richard was the younger son. His father's estates passed to his elder half-brother, Thomas. Some provision had, however, been made for him and on Thomas's death in 1435 he inherited the manor of Grafton Regis and the hundred of Cleyley in Northamptonshire.⁴ At this stage Richard was certainly only a poor squire with few lands, the bulk of the family estates going to his half-sisters, Elizabeth and Agnes.

Fortunately this was the period of the Hundred Years War and opportunities were endless for those prepared to fight in France. Richard's career has frequently been confused with that of his son, Richard, later to become Earl Rivers.⁵ It would appear that it was the career of the elder Richard, which brought the family into contact, not only with the duke of Bedford but with the king and the other great magnates involved in the war. Initially a servant of Henry V, he held French commands in 1415 and 1417 and was granted the seigniories of Preaux and Dangu in 1418. In 1420 he became an esquire of the body to Henry V and was made seneschal of Normandy. Following Bedford's appointment as regent of France after Henry V's death, Richard became his

³ M.A.Hicks, 'The changing role of the Wydevilles in Yorkist politics to 1483', *Patronage, Pedigree and Power*, ed. Charles Ross, Gloucester 1979, p. 83.

⁴ *The History of Parliament. The House of Commons 1386-1421*, ed J.S. Roskell, L. Clark and C. Rawcliffe, 4 vols, Stroud 1992, vol.4, p. 917. However, according to the Victoria County History, *Northamptonshire*, the Wydeviles had no right to Cleyley and it was taken into the king's hands as early as c.1329 (vol. 5, p. 2). The hundred did at some point return to the Wydeviles as Richard, Earl Rivers, held it in 1491, but the exact date is unknown. It is, however, probable that parts of Cleyley hundred passed to Richard, e.g. Roade (p. 353); Passenham was granted to Elizabeth by Edward IV in 1467 and she later granted it to Antony (p. 214); and Wick Dive was purchased by Richard and Jacquetta in 1449 from Richard, Duke of York (p. 420). It is commented that the Wydeviles were gradually accumulating land in the district from the thirteenth century (p. 2). Regarding Grafton itself, it only became the property of the Wydeviles in c.1440 when they purchased it from William de la Pole. Until then it is assumed they rented from de la Pole (pp. 148, 171). A licence dated 10 June 1440 related to letters patent dated 20 March 14 Henry VI, for William, Earl of Suffolk and Alice, his wife, to grant the manor of Grafton, Northants., 'wherof they were then and now jointly seised', to Richard Wydevile and Jacquetta his wife (*CPR 1436-41*, p. 426).

⁵ *Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *DNB*), p. 885, cites Dugdale for confusing the two men.

chamberlain and was rewarded with further confiscated French estates.⁶ In 1425 Richard returned to England. In February he was in London during disturbances against the Flemings. The bishop of Winchester 'sente Richard Wydevyle squyer to kepe the toure of london with men of armys as thogh it hadde been in londe of were'.⁷ Richard was still in command of the Tower when Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, attempted to take it, but was refused admission. The duke protested strongly to the next parliament that this had been done at the instigation of the bishop of Winchester. Winchester's response was that Wydevile had been trusted by King Henry V 'as well is knoew' and that he was 'also Chamberleyn and counseilling unto my lorde of Bedford', and that therefore the king's council had charged him with securing the Tower and admitting only those named by the king and his council.⁸ It would appear that Richard was well known and, more importantly, trusted by the most prominent men of his day.

In 1427 he returned to France and was made lieutenant of Calais in June 1429. During this time his daughter, Joan, married William Haute, esquire. Richard remained lieutenant of Calais even when he was given a position on Henry VI's council in 1431. During his service in France Richard would have met two men who were to have an effect on the life of his grandson, Antony. Thomas, Lord Scales, was an active soldier in France from the 1420s joining Bedford at Rouen in 1424, and the paths of the two men are bound to have crossed while in Bedford's service, though it is with his son, Sir Richard, (Antony's father), that Scales became more closely connected. However, it is the older Richard's association with John Lewis (also known as FitzLewis or Lewis John) that throws the most interesting light on his character. In 1428 Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, accused Wydevile, Lewis, who was warden of the mint in London and Calais, and Richard Bokeland, Treasurer of Calais, of being behind his deprivation of the captaincy of Calais. The three men took the matter up with Bedford asking that he speak on their behalf with Warwick, which he agreed to do. However, Bokeland continued to be out of favour with Warwick and a flurry of letters survive which show him trying to regain his favour. One letter is to Richard Wydevile. In it Bokeland writes that he has heard that Wydevile has been laying the blame for all that happened on Lewis and himself and that Warwick has therefore excused Wydevile. Bokeland's grief at this betrayal by someone he believed a friend is evident, 'the which I cannot suppos yn yow, Cousyn, treuly; ffor hit shulde be to me to greet meruaile, yf it so were. For God knoweth that, yf a cas felle, that touched my worship, or the contrarye, as muche as were possible, I durste right well disclose

⁶ DNB, p. 885.

⁷ *The Great Chronicle of London*, ed. A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley, London 1936, p.136.

⁸ *Great Chronicle*, pp. 139-40.

hit unto yow, as for trust of trouthe and secretness, as muche as to any persone liffyng'.⁹ There is no correspondence from Lewis, who seems to have maintained a discreet silence. Certainly his career did not suffer and any letters may be lost, but this episode does throw into question how trustworthy a friend Richard was. This is perhaps an early demonstration of Wydevile determination to survive and that where personal gain was concerned friendships were expendable.

Following the death of his half-brother, Thomas, Richard appears to have settled at Grafton. Bedford, too, had died in 1435 and it is likely that Richard's service in France terminated at the same time.¹⁰ He was sheriff of Northamptonshire in 1438 and died between 1441 and 1442. In his will made on 29 November 1441 he requested burial at Maidstone, Kent; his wife Joan survived him until at least July 1448.¹¹

How successful had his career been? He was entrusted with important offices but he never seems to have been knighted, his rewards in terms of land were all in France and therefore insecure, being lost as the French became more successful in regaining their territory. His estates in England were not increased by reward but by purchase so he must have made some money through the war. The manors of Shalford in Bedfordshire and the Mote in Kent were bought at some point, but later he had to sell some land to meet his debts. Richard had done well for a younger son, but his career had certainly not made him wealthy or increased his family's standing. When he died, his son Richard inherited only four manors and could justifiably still be considered to rank amongst the minor gentry.¹²

For Richard the younger his fortune was still to be made. Little is known of his early career. He was knighted by Henry VI on 19 May 1426 and in 1429 was serving in France.¹³ It was undoubtedly through his father's connections that Sir Richard came into contact with the Bedford household. According to the *Complete Peerage* he was a knight at the regent's court in 1435. If he held a position other than as a member of Bedford's retinue, it is unknown. Part of the confusion between him and his father has been the assumption that it was

⁹ *Letters of Queen Margaret of Anjou and Bishop Beekington and Others, Written in the Reigns of Henry V and Henry VI*, ed C. Munro, Camden Society 1863, pp. 34-43.

¹⁰ Anne Curry, 'English armies in the fifteenth century', in *Arms, Armies and Fortifications in the Hundred Years War*, ed Anne Curry and Michael Hughes, Woodbridge 1994, p. 62, suggests that after 1435 Bedford's affinity began to return home.

¹¹ *History of Parliament*, vol. 4, p. 917. In All Saints Church, Maidstone, all that remains of a Wydevile memorial is the indent from a double brass of a husband and wife. It is placed close to the altar in the Holy Name chapel. Neither Pevsner nor the short church guide considers it worthy of mention

¹² Hicks, 'Changing role', p. 62.

¹³ *DNB*, p. 886.



Fig. 1 Grafton Regis Church



Fig. 2 All Saints Maidstone

Sir Richard who was Bedford's chamberlain, perhaps because this would explain how he managed to get close enough to Bedford's young wife, Jacquetta, to marry her later. Whatever his position, it must have brought him into close personal contact with the female household, as this is surely the only place where he could have met her regularly.

Following the death of his first wife Anne, sister to the duke of Burgundy, Bedford married Jacqueline, eldest daughter to Pierre de Luxembourg count de St. Pol, and niece to Louis de Luxembourg bishop of Therouenne, chancellor of France for king Henry, and also to sir John de Luxembourg.¹⁴ Her youngest brother, Jacques, was second in command to Arthur of Brittany who was constable of France and later became duke of Brittany; Arthur was also their brother in law.¹⁵ Her uncle, John, was the celebrated commander who had captured Joan of Arc. The bishop of Therouenne had been negotiating for this marriage for some time and he marked his success by marrying them in his own cathedral. This was in early 1433, yet Anne had only died the previous November. Eagerness on the bishop's part and a need for Bedford to bolster English alliances in the region probably account for the speed. The duke of Burgundy, however, was displeased not only at the slight to his sister's memory, but over the fact that St Pol had not asked his permission;¹⁶ after all this was an important alliance and one which he may have wished to use to further his own interests.

During 1435 Sir Richard was on active duty in France and was taken prisoner at the siege of Gerberoy along with the earl of Arundel and Ralph Standish.¹⁷ He could not have been held long as he was serving with the earl of Suffolk in 1436. At what point Sir Richard came into contact with the seventeen-year-old duchess, whom Monstrelet describes as 'handsome, well made and lively', is unknown. Given that he was on active service the opportunities to meet must have been few; they are unlikely to have met before her marriage to Bedford, so there is a very short time frame in which they could have become acquainted. He must have made a powerful impression upon her within a very short period. Bedford died on 14 September 1435, and not long after they were married, most likely during 1436. On 23 March 1437 they paid a fine of £1,000 for marrying without a licence and it was not until 24 October of the same year that they obtained a pardon.¹⁸ Their first child, Elizabeth, was born in

¹⁴ *Monstrelet's Chronicles of England France Spain and the Adjoining Countries*, trans. T. Johns, London 1840, vol. 1, p. 614.

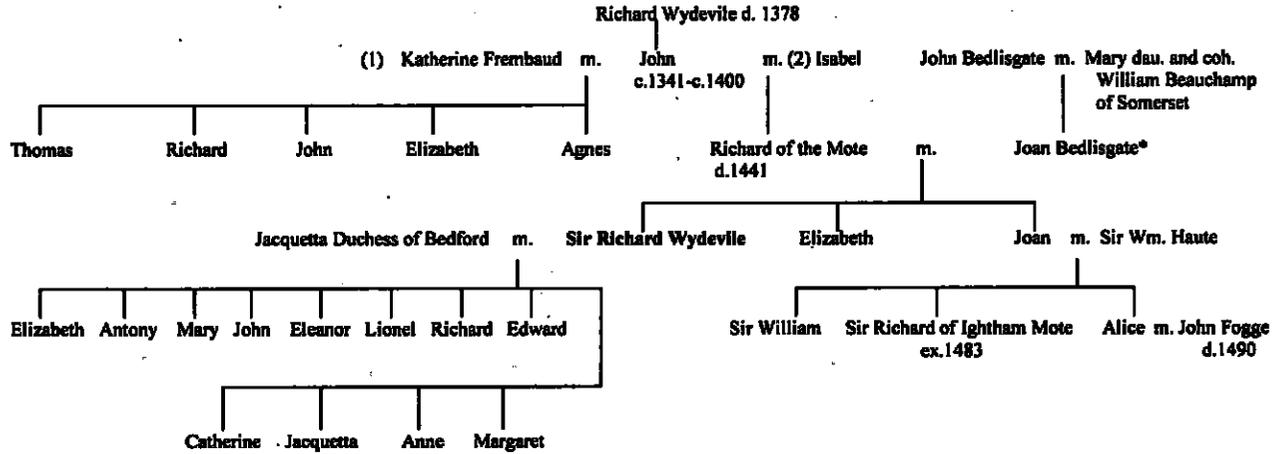
¹⁵ George Smith, *The Coronation of Elizabeth Wydeville Queen Consort of Edward IV*, Gloucester (reprint) 1975, pp. 35-36.

¹⁶ *Monstrelet*, vol. 1, p. 614.

¹⁷ *Monstrelet*, vol. 1, pp. 637-38.

¹⁸ *Monstrelet*, vol. 1, p. 614.

WYDEVILE



* This is according to the *Complete Peerage*. The *DNB* has Richard marrying Joan Beauchamp of Somerset

Fig. 3

1437. It is this short time scale which may have led to the rumours that they had had two children before they married.¹⁹

Jacquetta's family was certainly unimpressed.

In this year, the duchess of Bedford, sister to the count de St. Pol, married, from inclination, an English knight called sir Richard Woodville, a young man, very handsome and well made, but in regard to birth, inferior to her first husband, the regent, and to herself. Louis de Luxembourg, archbishop of Rouen, and her other relations, were very angry at this match, but they could not prevent it.²⁰

Here were two young people both considered so handsome, that it is unsurprising they should make a love match. As regards the young man, marriage to someone of a much higher social rank was an added bonus. The St Pol family was considered good enough to provide a wife for the duke of Bedford and had in the past provided a husband for Edward I's niece, Marie, but Jacquetta had certainly been disparaged by this marriage. It was her husband's social class that was important and it was this that was held against them; despite her aristocratic family Jacquetta was now a member of the 'minor' gentry even though she retained the title of duchess of Bedford.

Jacquetta did, however, bring a considerable dowry to her husband. She was assigned a third of Bedford's estate. The disposal of Bedford's estate was not straightforward; his first will made in 1429 had been extremely detailed, but things had changed since then, Anne had died and he needed to include Jacquetta. His second will was made on his deathbed, but both his wills followed French custom rather than English. Bedford asked that all debts be paid and wrongs righted, and this appears much earlier in the will than was common in England, suggesting it was drawn up by a French notary. He also tried to leave Jacquetta a life interest in all his lands on both sides of the Channel. This was in contradiction to English common law, which only allowed a half share.²¹ She was granted her dower rights in England, Calais and the Channel Islands on 6 February 1436, on condition she did not remarry without royal permission. The £1,000 fine imposed when she admitted her marriage to Sir Richard included the regrant of her dower rights. Unfortunately this consisted mostly of annuities, which were an insecure source of income, and those estates that were included were only third shares. On her death both would be lost to her family, and it was therefore imperative that Richard and Jacquetta convert as much of the money as possible into land or acquire the remaining two thirds of an estate thus improving her claim to the whole.²² There was one

¹⁹ DNB, p. 886.

²⁰ *Monstrelet*, vol. 2, p. 46.

²¹ Jenny Stratford, *The Bedford Inventories*, London 1993, pp. 22-25.

²² Hicks, 'Changing role', p. 63; Stratford, *Inventories*, p. 26. The division of Bedford's

exception and that was the manor of West Thurrock in Essex, which Bedford had purchased in 1434; in respect of this manor, at least, his provision for Jacquetta was respected. In addition, it was granted to Richard in tail male after her death, for his good service.²³ The lands in France and Normandy were lost however, some because of the war, but the remainder to Henry VI. On 2 September 1435 Bedford had granted to her the county of Harcourt with Le Neubourg, La Riviere-Thibouwill and Combon, on condition that if she re-marry it was to an English subject. However, Henry VI granted them to Edmund Beaufort in the following December, doubtless at the instigation of Cardinal Beaufort. Despite this Jacquetta managed to hang on to the estate until 1437, when Edmund successfully seized the estate. The Wydeviles took action in the court at Rouen, but Edmund remained in possession until the French regained it in 1449. The lands of Le Neubourg, La Riviere-Thibouwill and Combon remained hers until the French took them in 1444.²⁴ The final settlement of Bedford's will was hampered by the fact that there were powerful claimants to his lands, such as Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, who had a claim as his legal heir, while the king himself claimed any lands held of the crown. Jacquetta lacked influence in England to strengthen her position and, in fact, weakened any case she may have had by her re-marriage. Disputes over Bedford's will continued into the 1450s mainly because of the involvement of these claimants and the political situation in both England and France. Jacquetta should perhaps have counted herself lucky to have as much settled on her as she did and so quickly.

Following Henry's marriage to Margaret of Anjou, Jacquetta had a new advantage of a family connection: her sister, Isabel, was married to the queen's uncle, Charles of Anjou. As dowager duchess of Bedford, Jacquetta was now the second lady at Henry's court in terms of precedence, but in terms of in-

lands are complex to say the least. Part of this is due to the grants made to Bedford in the first place. For example 8 July 1433 he was granted two thirds of the manors of Caneford, Ambresbury and Wynterbourne with remainder of the third on the death of Alice Chaucer, which she held in dower following the death of her husband Thomas Montague, Earl of Salisibury (*CPR 1429-36*, pp. 297-98). This suggests the literal granting of a third of a manor in dower rather than a third of the entire estate. Likewise grants were made of the reversion of various thirds held by Jacquetta to Henry, Bishop of Winchester, and Ralph, Lord Cromwell (*CPR 1436-42*, p. 394 and p. 384 respectively). In fact it appears that the bishop, Cromwell and Suffolk were all successfully petitioning the king to make their holdings into whole parts as we find Jacquetta receiving money in compensation for some of her third and two-thirds parts (*CPR 1436-41*, p. 479). It would appear that the Wydeviles had no influence with the king as they consistently lost out to more powerful men at court. It may also be possible that some of these transactions were being made to meet the fine for their marriage.

²³ *CPR 1446-52*, p.205. Grant was made 20 December 1448.

²⁴ Stratford, p. 27.

come she was little better off than the wife of any other member of the gentry. On paper she may have looked wealthy but actually getting the money due from annuities was always difficult. It was therefore necessary for Sir Richard to rise to maintain their position. They must have hoped that her close relationship to Queen Margaret would obtain them the necessary royal favours to improve their long-term financial position. In May 1448 Henry VI created Sir Richard a baron and lord Rivers, but he was not given any land to sustain the title, only money.²⁵ He was also rewarded with offices, becoming a member of the privy council and seneschal of Aquitaine in October 1450. On 4 August of the same year he was made a knight of the Garter following his nomination by Lord Scales and Sir John Fastolf,²⁶ connections from his campaigns in France. In 1452 he was sent on an expedition to Gascony and appointed one of Somerset's deputies as lieutenant of Calais in 1454/55. This move abroad may have both benefited Rivers and also conveniently removed him from court. During Cade's Rebellion in 1450, Rivers, along with Lord Dudley, Sir Thomas Stanley and Thomas Danyel, had commanded forces pursuing rebels in Kent and had fought a battle near Sevenoaks.²⁷ They had been over-zealous, for during August to October a commission of oyer and terminer in Kent looked into their actions, following complaints made by Cade's rebels.²⁸ The records are incomplete but it must have been sufficiently serious for the king to take action. In 1452 a commons' petition in parliament demanded the removal of twenty-nine named persons permanently from the king's presence. The commons of Kent had named twenty people, including Rivers.²⁹ This undoubtedly related to his actions against the rebels; removing him to France allowed the affair to settle down while apparently meeting the commons' demand. Whatever else he had done, this demonstrates that at this early date Rivers was capable of inspiring dislike, proving unpopular with the people, if not with the king.

Rivers remained in Calais until 1455 when, following the battle of St Albans, Warwick was appointed captain and Rivers was recalled.³⁰ During the

²⁵ *Complete Peerage*, George E. Cockayne, London 1959, vol. 12, p. 23.

²⁶ Smith, *Coronation of Elizabeth Wydeville*, p. 46.

²⁷ D. MacGibbon, *Elizabeth Woodville (1473-1492). Her Life and Times*, London 1938, p. 13.

²⁸ R. Virgoe, 'Some ancient indictments in the King's Bench referring to Kent 1450-1452', *Documents Illustrative of Medieval Kentish Society*, ed F.R.H. Du Boulay, *Kent Archaeological Society*, vol. 18 (1964) pp. 215-16. The commission of oyer and terminer to investigate offences and extortions committed by officials in Kent was in response to complaints made by the rebels about their treatment. Unfortunately the indictments do not survive to see the detail of the offences, but they must have been serious for complaints made by rebels to be investigated.

²⁹ P. A. Johnson, *Duke Richard of York 1411-1460*, Oxford 1988, p. 91.

³⁰ Smith, *Coronation of Elizabeth Wydeville*, p. 47.

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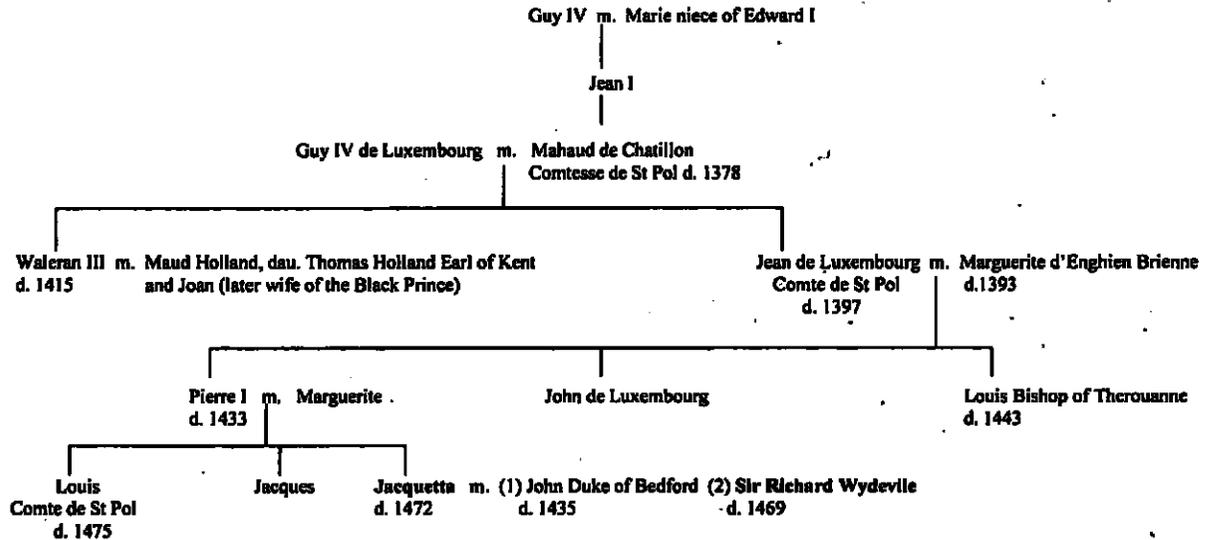


Fig. 4

next five years Rivers was busy on the king's business. A particularly insensitive appointment, given the recent feelings in Kent, was his appointment to a commission in June 1456 looking into treasons committed since the previous Christmas.³¹ In July 1457 he was appointed to a commission to suppress unlawful gatherings and congregations against the king in Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire. This was followed in November by a grant for life of the office of keeper of Rochester Castle.³²

As the political situation between the king and the duke of York worsened, Rivers' appointments placed him firmly within the Lancastrian orbit. On 31 July 1458 he was asked to look into the action of Richard, Earl of Warwick, against foreign ships in the Channel.³³ On 30 October 1459 he was on a commission of array in Kent to resist the duke of York, Edward, Earl of March, and Richard, Earl of Warwick, who were holding Calais.³⁴ This was followed on 10 December by a commission to take a muster of men at arms and archers at Sandwich who were then to keep the sea safe.³⁵ Rivers captured a number of Warwick's ships, which were in Sandwich harbour and deterred any possible support for York. Warwick had many friends in Kent however, and this enabled him to launch a daring raid on Sandwich.³⁶ Amongst the Paston Letters is one from William Botoner, which passes on the latest news in January 1460: 'As for tydyngs here, I sende som ... how the Lord Ryvers, sir Antonye, hys son, and othyr hafe wonned Calix be a febel assault made at Sandwich by Denham, Squyer, with the nombre of viijc men, on Twyesday betwene iiij. And v. at cloks yn the mornynge'.³⁷ This has left us an image of them being dragged from their beds half-asleep and not quite aware of what was happening to them.

Upon their arrival at Calais they were brought before the earls of Warwick, Salisbury and March. The Paston Letters again provide a wonderfully vivid description of events.

As for tydyngs, my Lord Ryvers was brougth to Caleys, and by for the Lords with viij xx torches, and there my Lord of Salesbury reheted hym, calling hym knaves son, that he schuld be so rude to calle hym and these other Lords traytors, for they schall be found the Kyngs true liege men, whan he schuld be found a traytour, etc. And my Lord of War-

³¹ CPR 1452-61, p. 307.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 370, 394.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

³⁶ Cora L. Scofield, 'The capture of Lord Rivers and Sir Anthony Woodville, 19 January 1460', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 37 (1922), pp. 253-54.

³⁷ *The Paston Letters*, ed James Gairdner, Gloucester, microprint edition, 1983, vol. 3 p. 203, letter 399.

rewyk rehetyd hym, and seyde that his fader was but a squyer, and broute up with Kyng Henry the Vth, and sethen hymself made by maryage, and also made Lord, and that it was not his part to have swych langage of Lords, beyng of the Kyngs blood. And my Lord of Marche reheted hym in lyke wyse. And Sir Antony was reheted for his langage of all iij Lords in lyke wyse ...³⁸

Even at this early date the Wydeviles were being mocked for their lack of nobility and for their audacity in attacking their betters. It is certainly ironic that only four years later Edward would be Wydevile's son-in-law, and would thereby improve the family's position still further with this advantageous marriage.

Somehow the Wydeviles managed to escape. Were they considered too unimportant to hold under close surveillance? They rejoined Henry, fighting for him at Towton on 26 March 1461. Rivers accompanied Henry on his flight to Newcastle,³⁹ and it was reported that his son Antony had been killed in battle.⁴⁰ The Yorkists' convincing victory under the young earl of March made it obvious that a new order had arrived. Reporting from London the following August, Count Ludovico Dalligo sent the latest news to the duke of Milan:

The lords adherent to King Henry are all quitting him ... and at this present one of the chief of them has come, by name Lord de River, with one of his sons, men of very great valour. I held several conversations ... about King Henry's cause, and what he thought of it, and he answered me that the cause was lost irretrievably.⁴¹

Were the Wydeviles being realistic, hoping to do better under the new regime than they had under the old? The events at Sandwich and Calais were humiliating and could have left them in little doubt as to the feelings of the Yorkist regime for them. Pragmatism must have been the over-riding factor, and obviously they did not view the Lancastrian cause with the same loyalty that many did. Dalligo's remark on their valour is interesting. How had he formed this opinion? To date Rivers and Antony had both been absent from any fighting, except for the bloodbath at Towton. The incident at Sandwich had hardly been valorous, nor was their rapid change of side. Rivers may have had a reputation as 'an accomplished knight' having been selected to joust against Pedro Vasque de Saaved, chamberlain of the duke of Burgundy, at Smithfield in 1440,⁴² but Antony had barely been noticed before this date.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 204, letter 400.

³⁹ *DNB*, p. 886.

⁴⁰ *DNB*, p. 882.

⁴¹ *Calendar of State Papers Milan 1385-1615*, London 1912, vol. 1, pp. 101-02.

⁴² MacGibbon, *Elizabeth Woodville*, p. 12.

The Wydevile change of side had occurred only shortly before Dalligo wrote his report. In May Richard's possessions had been taken into the king's hands and it was 12 July before he received his pardon.⁴³ However, by December Rivers had been sufficiently accepted to have his wife's dower reconfirmed by Edward along with the grants made to him by Henry VI.⁴⁴ He was also regularly employed on commissions of oyer and terminer. There was little in Rivers' previous record to recommend him to the Yorkists, however anxious Edward was for reconciliation. As he had demonstrated in January 1460, Rivers was a nobody who could safely be pardoned.

One grant that Edward made early in his reign was likely to lead to conflict. On 20 September 1462 he granted his brother George, Duke of Clarence, the reversion of all the lands and possessions of the lordship of Richmond, which Jacquetta currently held in dower.⁴⁵ Rivers may well have feared that his options for turning Jacquetta's life interest into an hereditary one was closed. In fact, he and his wife could be faced with Clarence trying to enhance his acquisition, thus diminishing their interest. As the king's brother Clarence's position was by far the stronger. This fear was increased when a further grant was made to Clarence in January 1463 of the reversion of yet more of her lands.⁴⁶

What could not have been anticipated was the major change in their fortunes when on 1 May 1464 Edward secretly married Rivers' and Jacquetta's daughter, Elizabeth. Edward could not keep the secret for long: at the council meeting held in Reading the following September he admitted to his marriage and it was not long before the Wydeviles began to reap the benefits. On 4 March 1466 Richard was created treasurer of England, on 24 August 1467 he was made constable of England with a fee of £200 per annum, and the post was made virtually hereditary, as it was to go to his son on his death. On the 24 May 1466 he had also been elevated to Earl Rivers. These new positions gave him the power he needed to recover debts owing to him in the exchequer.⁴⁷ He now had direct access to the king and held posts from which he could increase his income and manipulate patronage.

Opinions on the marriage of Edward and Elizabeth were rapidly aired across Europe. Venetian merchants travelling through Bruges passed on the gossip from London, which was then forwarded to the duke of Milan on 5 October; Edward 'has determined to take the daughter of my Lord de Rivers, a widow with two children, having long loved her, it appears. The greater part of the lords and the people in general seem very dissatisfied at this, and ... (are)

⁴³ *CPR 1461-67*, p. 97.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 169, grant 10 Dec. 1461, pp. 81, 83, 2 grants made 12 Dec. 1461.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 226-27, 25 Jan. 1463 lands in Luddeford and Burwell.

⁴⁷ *CPR 1467-77*, pp. 33, 34:24 Aug. 1467 £6,500 owed to Rivers and three others; and 27 Dec. 1467 £2,000 owed to Rivers and four others (p. 59).

finding means to annul it ...'.⁴⁸ The Milanese ambassador in France made a similar report on the same day.⁴⁹ In 1483 Dominic Mancini was still demonstrating European interest in English affairs when summing up England's problems of the previous twenty years '... the queen ennobled many of her family. Besides, she attracted to her party many strangers and introduced them to court, so that they alone should manage the public and private business of the crown, surround the king ... give or sell offices, and finally rule the very king himself'.⁵⁰ This is a curious echo of a report made in August 1469 to the duke of Milan 'As your lordship must have heard, the king here took to wife a widow of this island of quite low birth. Since her coronation she has always exerted herself to aggrandise her relations ...' this had brought things 'to such a pass that they had the entire government of this realm'.⁵¹ Both outsiders and the English nobility saw the Wydeviles as being of low birth and both saw them as aggrandising themselves and their relations. If Mancini was picking up current gossip and information, this perception of the Wydeviles had barely changed.

It was a view of which the earl of Warwick took advantage when he rebelled against Edward in 1469 and started a propaganda campaign, which condemned the Wydeviles. Perhaps it was Warwick's propaganda that the Milanese ambassador reported back to the duke? Or had he made deeper investigations of current opinion that might be expected from an ambassador? Warwick's view was repeated in a commons petition against, 'the deceivable covetous rule, and guiding, of certain seditious persons; that is to say; The Lord Rivers; the Duchess of Bedford ...'. Also in the list were Rivers' sons, Antony and John, and Lord Herbert.⁵² As had happened in previous reigns it was not the king that was attacked, but his evil councillors. It was proposed to protect the king from those who took advantage of him. In reality Warwick was not prepared to be excluded from the king's favour and the government of the realm. Others had benefited as much if not more from Edward's largesse, but it was the Wydeviles who stood out in the public perception; a Wydevile queen made this inevitable, especially a queen with so many brothers and sisters to be taken care of.

The Wydeviles' immediate gains had been the marriages arranged for their numerous children. Four daughters married the heirs of nobles who were ei-

⁴⁸ *CSPM*, vol. 1, p. 113.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114 '... King Edward has married a widow of England... This has greatly offended the people of England'.

⁵⁰ Armstrong, p. 79.

⁵¹ *CSPM*, vol. 1, p. 131.

⁵² *Chronicles of the White Rose of York*, ed., J. Tull, London 1845, p. 219, extracts from various documents, Commons Petition to the Barons, MS Roll in the Ashmolean Museum no. 1160.

ther close to the king, or wealthy, or both. The heirs of the earls of Essex and Kent, of the duke of Buckingham and Lord Herbert were snapped up. Their son, John, made an equally advantageous (and shocking) marriage to the dowager duchess of Norfolk who was well into her sixties. They were doing no more than other nobles did, but with so many children it meant they cornered the marriage market and left little for anyone else. Warwick especially was aggrieved;⁵³ he had two daughters who needed suitable husbands.

It is noticeable that grants made to the Wydeviles tended to be in offices, not in lands. Edward had little to distribute in 1464, having already made generous grants to those who had supported him in the early 1460s. Hastings, William Herbert and Warwick himself had been among the major beneficiaries. The offices granted to Rivers placed him in a position which encouraged accusations of abuse. He was able not only to ensure that he received full payment of his annuities and full rewards for his offices, but he could also be open to bribes and ensure that others, too, received prompt payment or obtained offices and grants.

While not gaining in lands, the Wydeviles thus gained in influence. Patronage and access to it through the king was always a major source of friction. Those close to the king were open to the accusation of abuse of privilege and the Wydeviles proved to be no exception. The Crowland Chronicler noted that it was not Edward's marriage that had caused Warwick to become disaffected, but the change in foreign policy that it had brought about.⁵⁴ It was a symptom of his diminishing influence over the king and a perceived increase in Wydevile influence. What Warwick failed to realise was that the king was capable of making his own decisions and in this instance the personal feelings of the king over Burgundy coincided with those of the Wydeviles.

Whatever influence they may have had in Edward's first reign, in his second reign the influence of the Wydeviles was much reduced. Mancini writing in 1483 thought power and influence now lay with Hastings,⁵⁵ who had always been close to the king, both as a congenial companion and as an adviser. But by 1483 there were of course, fewer Wydeviles: Warwick's rebellion had removed some of the competition.

The problems between Warwick and Edward came to a head with the marriage of Margaret of York to the duke of Burgundy. Warwick had arranged a French alliance, but returned to England in August 1467 to find that a Burgundian match had been made. Edward had already banned the marriage be-

⁵³ M.A. Hicks, *False, Fleeting, Perjur'd Clarence. George, Duke of Clarence 1449-1478*, Gloucester 1980, p. 49.

⁵⁴ *The Crowland Chronicle Continuation 1459-86*, ed. N. Pronay and J. Cox, London 1986, p. 115.

⁵⁵ C. Ross, *Edward IV*, Trowbridge 1975 (Bookclub Edition), p. 74 quoting Mancini on Hastings as 'the author of the sovereign's public policy'.

tween his brother, George, and Warwick's eldest daughter, Isabel.⁵⁶ Grants made to the Wydeviles at this time were also seen as provocative by Warwick. During 1468 Antony Wydevile was granted the Channel Isles and appointed keeper of the seas, a position Warwick wanted as recompense for having lost the post of admiral to the duke of Gloucester.⁵⁷

Warwick issued a warning shot when he promoted an attack on the Wydevile manor of the Mote in Kent on New Year's Day 1468. Edward attempted reconciliation in March, using Archbishop Neville as mediator. Warwick was reconciled with Lords Herbert, Stafford and Audley, whom he had named as his enemies the previous January when he refused to attend the king at Coventry, but he remained un-reconciled with either Rivers or his son Antony. In early 1469 Warwick went against Edward's wishes and arranged the marriage of Isabel to George, Duke of Clarence, which took place at Calais on 11 July. In June the rebellion of Robin of Redesdale had begun in the north, Edward reacted slowly, thinking his northern lords could deal with it as they had with the rebellion of Robin of Holderness, and continued on his pilgrimage to Walsingham, raising men as he went. As the rebellion escalated, Edward called out his levies from Wales and the West Country. At Edgecote on 24 July 1469 the two armies met. Warwick took this opportunity to remove as many of his enemies as he could. The earl of Pembroke, Sir Richard and Thomas Herbert, Humphrey Stafford, Earl of Devon, Rivers and his younger son, John, were all executed. Edward was taken prisoner and one of Warwick's retainers took the opportunity to accuse Jaquetta of sorcery.⁵⁸ An attack was made on Antony's Norfolk estate, but he himself managed to escape.

No condemnation for this action appears in the chronicles, Crowland simply reports it without comment and the Pastons are silent. Was this an indication of the dislike for the Wydeviles and was Warwick considered justified in his action? Certainly the Wydeviles had an image problem. Whether or not they were as greedy and grasping as they were pictured, they were demonstrably unpopular, especially in Kent. There is one infamous incident that was used to prove their greed: this is the case against Thomas Cook, which occurred shortly before the rebellion. The treatment of Cook meant the Wydeviles' ap-

⁵⁶ Hicks, *False, Fleeting*, pp. 43-44. Hicks does not give an exact date. It would appear to be during 1466 and 1468. Clarence came of age in July 1466, though discussions were apparently taking place as early as 1464.

⁵⁷ M.A. Hicks, *Warwick the King Maker*, Oxford 1998, pp. 263-65. Antony was appointed keeper of the seas in October 1468.

⁵⁸ Hicks, *Warwick*, p. 277. Scofield, p. 498, has Rivers and his son John being taken at Chepstow or the Forest of Dean and then beheaded at Gosford Green outside Coventry on 12 August. However, Warkworth has them being taken to Northampton and executed with Pembroke and Sir Richard Herbert at the commandment of Clarence and Warwick.

parent rapaciousness was fresh in people's minds when Warwick launched his propaganda attack against them.

Cook was imprisoned for treason, on what was considered to be a false charge, in 1468. The story, as told in the *Great Chronicle*, claims that Cook was badly treated by the Wydeviles, who were responsible for his arrest, false imprisonment, spoliation of his home and goods and throwing his wife out onto the street. While Rivers seized his London house and ransacked his property in Essex, Jacquetta coveted his tapestries. Due to the good offices of Sir John Markham, who judged the case, Cook was released and fined for misprision. The fine was 8,000 marks and the bad treatment of Cook by the Wydeviles was further compounded by the queen demanding 'queen's gold'.⁵⁹ The pseudo-Worcester chronicle also has the story, with the Wydeviles again being responsible for Cook's suffering. The case is fully recorded in the *Great Chronicle*, but the author of the *Chronicle* was not an impartial witness, having been Cook's apprentice, and it was written from memory many years later. The picture created of the Wydeviles is certainly unpleasant. Was this story just one of many in circulation about Wydevile greed? It is an effective example of the general ill feeling generated by the Wydeviles; could Warwick's propaganda have been so successful if people did not believe they were a greedy, grasping family?

His greed achieved very little for Rivers except a damaged reputation and execution. By the time of his death in 1469 he had done little to translate his wealth into land. An example of this is demonstrated by the will of Dr Thomas Kent, clerk to the king's council. He left the manor of 'Gorecot' and 'Brussyng', Kent, to his widow for life, with the option for Richard, Earl Rivers, to purchase it for £360 within a year of his death. This fulfilled an agreement made between Kent and Rivers in the reign of Henry VI. If Rivers failed to purchase the manor then it was to be sold after the death of Kent's widow.⁶⁰ River did fail to purchase the manor, as Ralph Astry left it to his wife in 1493.⁶¹ Kent's will was proved in March 1469 so it may be that Rivers was unable to take up the opportunity as he died in the following July. Though it does suggest he was slow to take advantage of this opportunity, it can be wondered what other missed opportunities there were, and whether the Wydeviles were always short of ready cash. His son inherited little from Rivers, as his wealth had been in his offices and in Jacquetta's dower, which was hers and would never pass to her son, the income ending on her death. A range of contempo-

⁵⁹ *Great Chronicle*, pp. 204-08. Also see Anne F. Sutton, 'Sir Thomas Cook and his "troubles": an investigation', *Guildhall Studies in London History*, vol. 3 (1977-79), pp. 85-108. This reviews all the chronicle sources and their likely prejudices. Many of the complaints against the Wydeviles are unlikely and 'queen's gold' was not in fact paid.

⁶⁰ The National Archive, PROB 11/5, ff. 205-06v. I am grateful to the editor for this reference.

⁶¹ C.A. Martin, 'Dame Margaret Astry,' *The Ricardian*, vol. 14 (2004), p. 25.

raries saw the Wydeviles as of low birth and this had not changed. Social distinction was very important and a family's background could be used as a weapon against them, as illustrated above. The Pastons were afraid the Wydeviles were trying to use the Pastons' own origins against them during the Fastolf dispute and did all they could to scotch stories that they were churls.⁶² How much more sensitive then would the Wydeviles be to the claim that they were low born? This sensitivity could well have led to haughtiness, arrogance and the consequent observation that they were 'lacking in charm'.⁶³

From the evidence of the surviving contemporary records there can be little doubt that the Wydeviles were not from an English noble background, the illustrious St Pol ancestry of Jaquetta was (and is) continually disregarded. They failed to buy nobility by the acquisition of land, the only way in which they could successfully maintain their title into future generations. This need to acquire land undoubtedly encouraged their greed. They were a family 'made by maryage'.⁶⁴

⁶² C. Richmond, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century The First Phase*, Cambridge 1990, p. 16. Caroline Barron, 'Who were the Pastons?', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 4 (1972), p. 534.

⁶³ Ross, *Edward IV*, p. 97. Ross comments that they 'were not conspicuous for charm and amiability'.

⁶⁴ *Paston Letters*, vol. 3, p. 204, letter 400.