

Further Notes on William Herbert, Earl of Huntingdon

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INTEREST IN what became of William Herbert, Earl of Huntingdon, after the battle of Bosworth was expressed by L. T. Greensmith in a previous Ricardian.¹ His assumption that Herbert 'said nuthing and lay low' would appear to be substantially correct; however, the circumstances of his inactivity and the few specific references to him after Henry Tudor's accession leave one with food for further thought and perhaps further curiosity.

Despite the fact that Richard III named William Herbert to two commissions of array in 1484,² there is no indication that he took any part in the eventual battle. Various reasons may be put forth for his failure to act, ranging from military inability, to the effects of a childhood friendship with Henry Tudor,³ and to the prospect that Henry, if successful, might opt to marry one of the Earl's sisters as he himself had suggested.⁴

In contrast, William's younger brother Sir Walter Herbert seems to have taken a more active stance. Although there is no direct proof that he ever fought at Bosworth, on either side, there is ample evidence to suggest that he may have aided Henry by more than passive neutrality. In Vergil's account of Henry's landing at Milford Haven it is Sir Walter, not William, who first offered potential resistance to the invader's march through Wales.⁵ Apparently, nothing came of the threat. Henry passed by unhindered. Yet we know that another prominent Welshman, Rhys ap Thomas, eventually joined Henry with his men and fought for him at Bosworth. It is possible that Sir Walter did likewise.⁶ The strongest evidence for his support of Henry comes from Henry's treatment of him immediately after Bosworth. In the Act of Resumption passed by Henry's first Parliament, Sir Walter is termed 'our right trusty and well beloved Knight,' a description shared by few others mentioned in the Act, and provision is made to protect 'our Grant made unto him now of late . . . of the Office of Stewardship of our Lordships of Uske, Carlion and Treyleck. . . .'⁷ It is unlikely that Sir Walter would receive such an immediate reward or be spoken of in these terms if he had done no more than let Henry march around him. Within a short time he was the recipient of further offices.⁸

The same Act of Resumption also protected certain existing property rights of William, though he is named simply as 'William Earl of Huntingdon,' with none of the expressions bestowed upon his brother.⁹ Nor did he receive any grants of lands or office. It would therefore seem that Sir Walter was favoured—for a time at least—while the contact between William and Henry remained coolly, but correctly, polite. On 22nd September, 1486, Huntingdon received the following 'Pardon to William Herbert, knight, lord Herbert, *alias* William late Earl of Pembroke, and late chamberlain in South Wales, *alias* late chamberlain of Edward late prince of Wales, *alias* William Herbert late

earl of Pembroke, son and heir, and tenant of the lands of William late earl of Pembroke, *alias* William earl of Huntingdon, of all fines, issues, forfeit and accounts due from him, to August 2 last'.¹⁰ The wording is somewhat unusual in the completeness of the description of the grantee. It seems possible that William Herbert wanted to make quite sure of the validity of the pardon, as if he suspected that it might later be questioned.

William Herbert's title of Huntingdon was eventually reconfirmed by Henry on 17th May 1488, with the proviso that 'succession (was to be) to the heirs of the body of his said father.'¹¹ At this time Herbert was again a widower,¹² and he may have been in failing health. He had made out a will some years before, 21st July, 1483, to be exact, and on 4th September, 1484, had made a feoffment of his estates in Wales to his mother and others. He did in fact die relatively young, probably by the summer of 1490, aged about thirty-five.¹³

It may be interesting to digress for a moment and ask who was the heir to the Earldom of Huntingdon at William's death. William had no sons, and his daughter Elizabeth was debarred from succeeding to the title since the Earldom was entailed to the heirs male of the body of his father. Elizabeth became *de jure* Baroness Herbert (this title was a barony in fee) and transmitted it to her son, who also succeeded his father Charles Somerset as Earl of Worcester. The undoubted heir to the Earldom of Huntingdon was Sir Walter Herbert, their father's next surviving son. Despite this, however, and the fact that he had been favoured by Henry VII, he never succeeded to the title. A possible explanation for this curious fact suggests itself, but only as the wildest speculation. It is conceivable that William had a son, or was suspected of having a son, by his second wife, Katherine Plantagenet. This child would have indisputably been heir to the Earldom. There is no evidence, however, that such a child ever existed. Eventually the matter was settled. On 8th December, 1529, George, Lord Hastings, the second husband of Sir Walter's widow, was finally created Earl of Huntingdon.

On 16th September, 1507, Sir Walter Herbert died at the age of forty-six. An inquisition held at Cirencester on 20th November of that year found 'that William earl of Huntingdon died seised in fee of the castle and lordship of Ragland in the marches of Wales . . . after whose death Walter Herbert, knight, entered the same and received the issues thereof from 16th July, 6 Henry VII, until the day of his death . . . by what right and title was not known. . .'. On 29th January, 1509, Henry VII granted the castle and lordship to Sir Walter's widow, Anne Stafford, daughter of the second Duke of Buckingham, 'out of affection,' as well as a long list of goods 'which belonged to the said Walter at the time of his death and by reason of a certain outlawry promulgated against him were forfeited.'¹⁴ I have been unable to ascertain the nature of this outlawry. It can surely have had nothing to do with Sir Walter's initial opposition to Henry's landing at Milford Haven.¹⁵ Following the death of William Herbert, while succession to the earldom of Huntingdon remained unsettled, it may be that Sir Walter's popularity diminished. He was named to only two commissions during these later years,¹⁶ and apparently took part in several local disturbances for which he was required to pay a variety of

bonds and recognizances.¹⁷ Nonetheless, he was sufficiently in favour to play host to Queen Elizabeth at Raglan in August, 1502.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. L. T. Greensmith, *Ricardian*, Vol. 4, No. 54 (1976), p.29.
2. *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1476-1485* (1901), p.401. Appointed to commission for co. Hereford, 1st May, 1484. *Ibid.*, p.491. Same appointment repeated on 8th December, 1484.
3. On 12th February, 1462, William Herbert the elder, father of this William, received the custody and marriage of Henry Tudor (*Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1461-1467*, p.114). Henry remained with the Herbert family until his uncle Jasper retrieved him during the Lancastrian Radeption. It is possible that Henry and William became friends at this time (although William may himself have been sent away from home for tutelage, as was customary), and even more likely that Henry formed a friendship with the Herberts' second son Walter, who was somewhat younger than himself.
4. All of these reasons have been suggested by D. H. Thomas, *The Herberts of Raglan as Supporters of the House of York in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century*, M.A. Thesis, University College, Cardiff (1967), p.218.
5. Polydore Vergil, *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History*, Ed. Sir Henry Ellis, Camden Society (1844), p.216-217.
6. Howell T. Evans, *Wales and the Wars of the Roses* (1915), p.225, suggests that Sir Walter joined Henry along with Rhys ap Thomas. This possibility is discussed by Thomas, p.265-268, who provides corroboration from the Herbert family history, *Herbertorum Prosapia*, p.80. However, Thomas concludes that it is safest to take the position that Sir Walter remained neutral.
7. *Rotuli Parliamentorum* (The Rolls of Parliament), Vol. VI (1783), p. 379.
8. *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1485-1494*, p.88. Grant of the offices of steward and constable of the lordship of Cantreselly, and of steward of the lordship of Talgarth, 28th May, 1486. *Ibid.*, p.153. Grant of the office of receiver of the lordship of Cantreselly, 30th January, 1487.
9. *Rot. Parl.*, Vol. VI, p.375.
10. *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1485-1494*, p.141.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
12. *The Ricardian*, Vol. 4, No. 54 (1976), p.31. In the notes on Katherine Plantagenet it is shown that William Herbert was a widower at the time of Elizabeth of York's coronation.
13. Thomas, p.219-220, discusses the possibility that William Herbert suffered ill health. The date of his death is usually given as 16th July, 1491; however, Thomas has discovered a writ of *diem clausit extremum* dated 26th July, 1490, which indicates that Herbert was dead by that time. Source of the writ is the *Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1485-1509*, p.119.
14. *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1494-1509*, p.601-603.
15. As suggested in the official guidebook to Raglan Castle, H.M.S.O. (1970), p.13.
16. *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1485-1494*, p.355. Named to a commission to raise money from the lordships of Overwent and Netherwent and co. of Merioneth for a projected invasion of France, 7th July, 1491. *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1494-1509*, p.380. Named to a commission *de wallis et fossatis* in Gwent, 4th June, 1504.
17. Thomas, p. 270-271. Recognizances paid as surety on debts to the king, 16th May, 1486, and 9th September, 1491 (*Calendar of Close Rolls, 1485-1500*, p.36 and 180). A bond against troublemaking, 11th July, 1497 (*Ibid.*, p. 310). Recognizance to the king to keep the peace, 9th May, 1505 (*Cal. Close Rolls, 1500-1509*, p.177-178).