

What might have been: George Neville, Duke of Bedford 1465-83 — his identity and significance

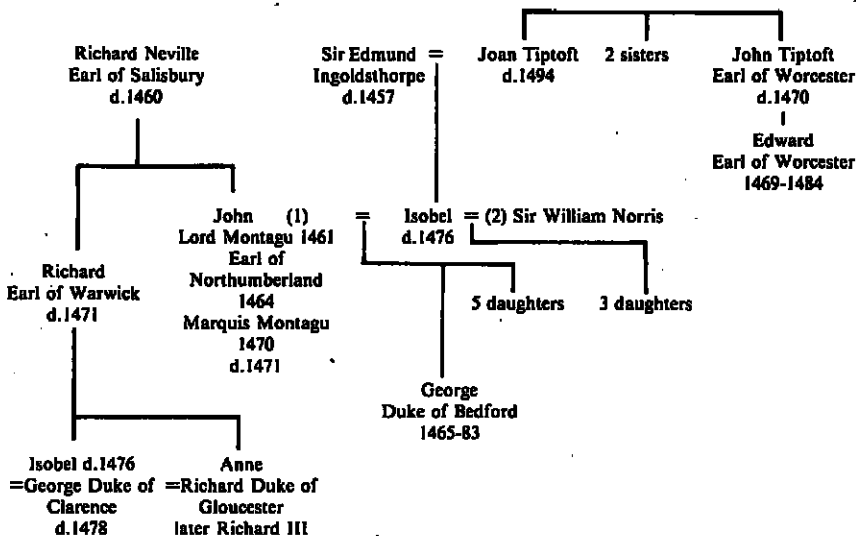
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GEORGE NEVILLE, Duke of Bedford was a major figure in Yorkist England and bulked especially large in the career of his cousin Richard, Duke of Gloucester, yet he has been sadly neglected and has attracted no biographer. This is hardly surprising, since he died still under age. His three known actions — birth, betrothal and death — are not the stuff of which biography is made. George was a pawn in the schemes of others and never devised his own. What qualified him even to be a pawn was his pedigree, which was a potent fact of politics. It was who he was, not what he did, that mattered. An earlier article has considered him from the angle of Richard, Duke of Gloucester.¹ This paper focuses on him personally and establishes his identity and significance.

George Neville was born on the feast of St. Peter's Chair, 22 February 1465,² the only son among the six children of John Neville and his wife Isobel Ingoldsthorpe. John Neville was the second son of Richard Neville (d.1460) and Alice Montagu (d.1462), Earl and Countess of Salisbury, the brother of Richard, Earl of Warwick and Salisbury (d.1471) — Warwick the Kingmaker — and George, Archbishop of York (d.1476). Created Lord Montagu in 1461, John Neville was Earl of Northumberland at George's birth. Isobel was the daughter of Sir Edmund Ingoldsthorpe and Joan Tiptoft, one of the three sisters of John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester (d.1470). In 1469, as part of Edward IV's strategy to control Warwick and Clarence, George was betrothed to the King's eldest daughter, the three-year-old Elizabeth of York, heiress presumptive to the throne and later Henry VII's Queen. George was created Duke of Bedford and his father Marquis Montagu.³ The latter defected to Henry VI in 1470 and was killed in 1471. No more was heard of George's royal marriage. From 1472 he was in the custody of his mother Isobel, who remarried to Sir William Norris, bore him three more daughters, and died in 1476. In 1478 parliament deprived George not only of his dukedom but also of his peerage altogether, in 1480 his wardship and marriage was granted to Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and on 4 May 1483 he died, still unmarried, leaving his sisters as coheireses.

When George was degraded from the peerage in 1478, the justification offered was that he lacked the resources to support the dignity. He may not have had the income usually required of a duke, but he certainly had sufficient for a baron. Apart from his £40 annuity as Duke of Bedford, he was then heir to his father's estates, to the lands held jointly by his parents, and to his mother's Ingoldsthorpe inheritance. Had he lived until 1484, he would then have become coheir to his cousin Edward Tiptoft, second Earl of Worcester through his grandmother Joan Ingoldsthorpe, sister of the first Earl. Finally, but for his father's political miscalculations, he would have inherited those Neville lands of Warwick the Kingmaker that were entailed in the male line — Middleham, Sheriff Hutton and Penrith — that were so vital to Richard III as Duke and King. None of this was accidental, as George's birth was the intended culmination of a series of deliberate dynastic marriages. Even in 1478 George had sufficient estates to support a peerage: had all gone to plan, he might have been the greatest heir of his time. That such prospects never materialised was due *primarily* (but not solely) to his death, still under age, in 1483.

THE LINEAGE OF GEORGE NEVILLE, DUKE OF BEDFORD



Because George's prospects did not materialise and because he achieved nothing, he has not been considered worthy of study by modern historians. Contemporaries did not know what was going to happen. They lacked our advantage of hindsight. They expected George to survive. They had indeed to assume that he would and plan accordingly. While history is about what happened rather than what did not, we must allow for prospects that were never fulfilled — what might have been — if we are fully to understand what did occur. George did not need to do anything: he merely had to exist and his existence was a political reality that could not be ignored.

George's father John Neville was a younger son with no expectations of inheriting anything from his parents the Earl and Countess of Salisbury. They, however, sought to provide for all their children and were prepared to make generous settlements for them. In 1458, on John's marriage to Isobel Ingoldsthorpe, they settled seven outlying manors in southern England jointly on the young couple, with remainder to their heirs. These were valued at £30 13s 4d in 1486.⁴ This jointure may have been the inducement that secured the marriage for John in the first place.

For Isobel Ingoldsthorpe was a considerable heiress. She was the sole daughter and heiress of Sir Edmund Ingoldsthorpe and his wife Joan Tiptoft. At his death in 1457 Sir Edmund held an annuity of 500 marks (£333-13s 4d) from the Exchequer and twenty-four manors in eight counties, including ten in Norfolk, four in Cambridgeshire and six in Gloucestershire. These were valued — or surely considerably undervalued? — at only £73 in his inquisition post mortem.⁵ Even so, the income yielded was at least £406, quite sufficient to support the dignity of a baron, but at least a third was held in dower by Sir Edmund's widow throughout the lives of her daughter Isobel and grandson George. Even taken together, therefore, Isobel's inheritance and their jointure did not make John Neville a great magnate, but they were ample justification for his elevation to the peerage as Lord Montagu in 1461.

⁴ John Neville was a relatively minor member of the faction that made Edward IV King and thus received relatively minor rewards in the early years of the new regime. At first he received nine forfeited manors to be held in tail male. One, Hellow, had belonged to Lord Welles, but the other eight, situated in Norfolk, Suffolk, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, had belonged to Viscount Beaumont.⁶ Together they added substantially to John's resources without totally transforming them. Two manors soon escaped from his grasp, Hellow being restored to Lord Welles and another to Lady Beaumont, but these were counteracted by the spectacular rewards John received for his military achievements in the north, notably his victories at Hedgeley Moor and Hexham in 1464. He was promoted Earl of Northumberland, granted lands in Northumberland worth perhaps as much as £1000 a year, plus the reversion of others on the death of the elder Countess Eleanor.⁷ That John saw his future as being in the north is suggested by those properties that he acquired by purchase or force during these years: miscellaneous small-holdings in Yorkshire and nine manors including Seaton Delaval in Northumberland, together valued at £71 in 1483.⁸

From the moment of his birth George Neville was assured of an earldom and property worth about £1500 a year on the deaths of his parents and his

grandmother Joan Ingoldsthorpe. But this was not all. Unless his paternal uncle Warwick remarried and had a son, George would succeed as heir male to the Earl's Neville inheritance, which comprised the lordships of Middleham and Sheriff Hutton in Yorkshire and Penrith in Cumberland and their appurtenances, which may have been worth £1500-£2000 a year. Nor was this all. Unless his cousin the Earl of Worcester married for a third time and bore a son — which appeared improbable, as he had been a widower since 1452 — George would become entitled to a third share of the Tiptoft inheritance on his death and those of his grandmother Joan Ingoldsthorpe (née Tiptoft) and his own mother. The Tiptoft estates had been valued at 1100 marks (£733 6s 8d) in 1436.⁹ In short, George appeared destined to inherit estates worth over four thousand pounds a year, a sum that would have made him one of the greatest of noblemen. The King's own brother George, Duke of Clarence was worth only £4500 in 1467. While these lands were distributed all over England and on the marches of Wales, they were concentrated in the north, where he would be an even greater landholder than Warwick himself. No wonder that almost as soon as he was born his marriage was proposed to the Duchess of Exeter's daughter Anne. Her inheritance would have lifted George into a class of his own, the greatest nobleman of his generation, had the King not induced the Duchess with 4000 marks to see more immediate advantages in a match with his stepson Thomas Grey. Warwick is reported to have been enraged by her decision¹⁰ — a sure sign that he regarded George as his ultimate heir! — but there was ample time to find a suitable heiress for the infant George.

Following his remarriage in 1467, a son was born to the Earl of Worcester in 1469, who cut George Neville out of his Tiptoft inheritance. More important, as part of King Edward's reconstruction of his support, George was betrothed in November 1469 to Elizabeth of York, a match that *could* have led to his accession as her consort had Edward IV died without a son, which he had no intention of doing and made sure did not happen. More permanent was George's creation as Duke of Bedford — the highest rank of the peerage, that eluded his great uncle Warwick the Kingmaker — and the grant to him of an annuity of £40 a year. Next spring George's father John Neville was induced to surrender his earldom and his Percy estates in Northumberland for a 'pies nest' — the prestigious title of Marquis Montagu and Courtenay lands in Devon possibly equal in value to those he surrendered, but not what he wanted. John Neville's rebellion in 1470 did not recover him his Percy estates: instead he lost his Courtenay lands to the restored Earl of Devon and was confirmed only in his tenure of Wressle.¹¹ Young George could then expect only to inherit his parents' jointure, his maternal inheritance, the limited property held by his father in his own right, and Warwick's Neville estates. The chances of a share in the Tiptoft inheritance brightened somewhat in 1470 when the execution of the Earl of Worcester left only one life, that of his one-year-old son Edward, standing between inheritance and partition. George was still assured of about £3000 a year, ample for a duke certainly, but less than had seemed likely five years before.

The two Neville brothers Warwick and Montagu died fighting Edward IV in 1471 in an unavailing effort to keep him from his throne. Montagu was thus a traitor, the blood of himself and his heirs was corrupted, his possessions were

forfeit and could not be inherited by his descendants. Accordingly King Edward gave away Montagu's Beaumont lands, seized his own trifling possessions, and gave the Neville inheritance, which he also considered confiscated, to his own brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester.¹² This disaster did not, however, touch George's right to inherit his parents' jointure, his mother's property, or indeed anything else that he could inherit from her Ingoldsthorpe or Tiptoft ancestors. Nor did it affect his dukedom and £40 annuity, which had been given him personally. He was still assured of a considerable inheritance, about £400 a year, but one more appropriate for a baron than for a duke.

Warwick and Montagu were indicted of treason by a commission of oyer and terminer in 1472 and it was probably intended to confirm their attainder by a special act of parliament against them. This, however, was never done, so George's title to his father's lands and to his uncle's Neville patrimony was left open. It was explicitly barred by an act of parliament in 1475 that gave the Neville lands to the King's brothers the Dukes of Clarence and Gloucester as long as there were heirs male of the Marquis Montagu living¹³ — George and his as yet unborn sons. The royal Dukes thus had a parliamentary title to the Neville lands, but acts of parliament could always be reversed. In particular, it was normal for acts of attainder to be revoked. Clarence and Gloucester, of course, were secure so long as George was a minor, but in due course he would come of age. Would they be able to resist pressure for his restoration to the Neville inheritance? He was, after all, a duke like themselves and related by marriage to most of the nobility. His maternal inheritance alone placed him among the leading aristocracy. He remained an attractive catch on the marriage market and if he married wisely, to the daughter of someone powerful at court, he might be able to insist on his rights. There were fathers-in-law who speculated on these kind of matches for their daughters. Even if he failed initially, how could the King's two brothers ensure that George Neville's rights were not made good at the expense of their heirs? By 1478 it must have seemed most unlikely that George's Neville inheritance was forever lost to him.

It is here that George's dukedom and annuity become important, as it was these that made him a royal ward. In 1472 the King gave him into the custody of his mother and granted her 200 marks a year for his upkeep from the royal purse. But Edward did not give her the right to marry him off.¹⁴ Had he done so, or had George not held this annuity in his own right and thus escaped wardship, she could have wed her son to the daughter of someone able to protect him against his demotion from the peerage in 1478. Instead she died in 1476, leaving George — still a minor, still unmarried — as a royal ward. It was the Duke of Gloucester who became his guardian on the strength of his maternal inheritance, formally in 1480, informally perhaps somewhat earlier.

George was degraded from the peerage by parliament in 1478 on account of lack of means. Actually, as we have seen, he had substantial possessions, if no longer sufficient to place him in the front rank. His demotion meant that, when he came of age, he could not put his own case in the Upper House. It marginally reduced his prospects on the marriage market. That was the other problem. If Gloucester was to retain his Neville lands, he had to ensure that George married and had a son, but he also had to ensure that he did not marry into a family powerful enough to make good his claims. For Gloucester the best way to

achieve his end was to arrange the marriage himself and the first step towards this conclusion was Gloucester's acquisition of George's custody. He had not, however, married George off before he died on 4 May 1483 — an event disastrous both to George himself and to Gloucester. With George's death, there were no longer heirs male of the Marquis Montagu living. Under the 1475 act, this meant that Gloucester became only life-tenant of the Neville inheritance. On his death, the heir would no longer be his son Edward, Earl of Salisbury, but Richard, Lord Latimer. For reasons beyond the scope of this article, Latimer's good fortune also failed to materialise.¹⁵ Gloucester's son Edward could not succeed as 'Lord of the North': Duke Richard had wasted the twelve years 1471-83 and needed now to build his power and wealth anew.

Next year George's cousin Edward Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester died childless and his possessions were partitioned among his aunts, one of whom was Joan Ingoldsthorpe, who died in 1494. Had George been living, he would have grossed her share. Instead it was eventually divided into relatively small parcels among his five sisters, three half-sisters, and their heirs. George Neville was dead and soon forgotten, his prospects never materialised, yet they played an essential part in the machinations of contemporary politicians. If his recorded actions — his birth, death and betrothal were strictly involuntary, they were also major political events that shaped the power and career, of among others, the future Richard III.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. *Calendar of Inquisitions post mortem, Henry VII*, vol. 1, p.210.
3. M. A. Hicks, *False, Fleeting, Perjur'd Clarence* (Gloucester 1980), pp.58-60.
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5. PRO., Chancery, Inquisitions post mortem, Henry VI, C 139/165/2; *CIPM Henry VII*, vol. 1, p.212.
6. *CPR 1461-7*, p.195.
7. *CPR 1461-7*, pp.341, 484; *1467-77*, p.91.
8. PRO., C 140/83/11/1-2, 12/1; *Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1485-1509*, nos. 135, 137.
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11. Hicks, *Clarence*, p.100; *CPR 1467-77*, p.239.
12. *CPR 1467-77*, pp.422, 511; PRO., C 140/83/11/2, 12/1; Hicks, *The Ricardian*, no. 81, p.177.
13. Hicks, *The Ricardian*, no. 81, p.178.
14. *CPR 1467-77*, pp.313, 335.
15. Hicks, Descent, Partition and Extinction, pp.124-5.