

# SUFFOLK CONNECTIONS OF THE HOUSE OF YORK<sup>1</sup>

by JOHN ASHDOWN-HILL

THE HOUSE OF YORK ruled England briefly in the second half of the fifteenth century, and comprises Edward IV (reigned 1461-1483), Edward V (1483) and Richard III (1483-1485). There is no published itinerary for the reigns of Edward IV and V, and the published itinerary of Richard III<sup>2</sup> records no visits to Suffolk during his two-year reign. In spite of this, it is certain that both Edward IV (as king) and Richard III (as duke of Gloucester) visited Suffolk on several occasions. The evidence for these royal visits is not well known. Indeed, in the case of Edward IV's visit to Clare in 1463 both the evidence and the visit seem previously to have passed entirely unremarked. This article presents the evidence relating to the visits of both Edward and Richard in the context of some of the dynasty's wider links with the county.

The Yorkist kings had strong family ties in Suffolk. Elizabeth of York (1444-1503), sister of Edward IV and Richard III, married, early in 1458, John de la Pole, second Duke of Suffolk. Thereafter her principal home was in Suffolk, at Wingfield Castle. Her remains lie in the county to this day, for she was buried at her husband's side, beneath a fine alabaster effigy in a canopied tomb on the north side of the chancel of Wingfield Church. Elizabeth's tomb at Wingfield is perhaps the most important surviving funerary monument of a member of the house of York<sup>3</sup>. Elizabeth's presence also left a Yorkist mark elsewhere in the county, at Stratford St Mary church, for example, where fifteenth-century white roses still figure in the stained glass of the windows<sup>4</sup>.

The dynasty had particularly close links with Clare and neighbouring towns. These links were ancestral in origin. The Yorkist kings based their claim to the throne on the fact that theirs was the senior line of descent from Edward III. The claim to seniority is, in itself, indisputable<sup>5</sup>. It rests not

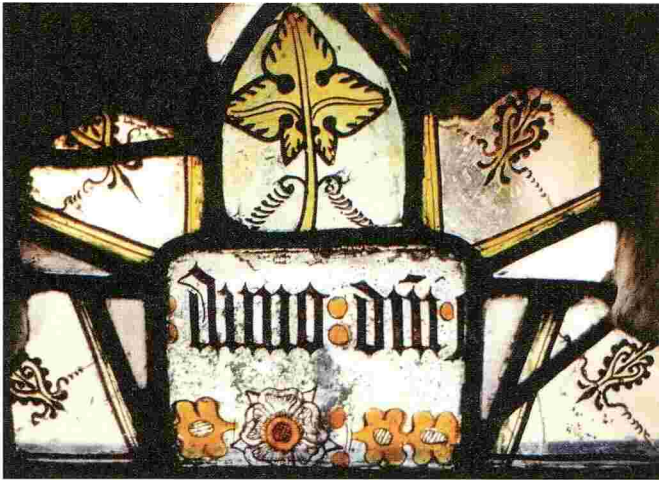


FIG. 45 – Fifteenth-century white rose of York. Stained glass from the Little Cloister Window, Clare Priory. Photograph courtesy of David Scheinmann Photography, reproduced by permission of Fr David Middleton, OSA, Prior of Clare.

on their male-line descent from Edward III's fifth son, Edmund of Langley, Duke of York, but on their female-line descent from Edward III's third son, Lionel of Antwerp, Duke of Clarence.

The bones and heart of this most important progenitor of the house of York lie buried at Clare Priory, together with the body of Elizabeth de Burgh, his wife, heiress of the house of Clare (from whom the Yorkist kings were thus also directly descended). It has in the past been a matter of discussion whether Lionel was really buried at Clare (and if so, how much of him) since there was also a tomb in his name at Milan, where he had died. The facts of Lionel's burial are, however, very clearly stated by John Capgrave, a fifteenth-century Augustinian friar from Bishop's (King's) Lynn. Capgrave writes that 'Lionel, just before his death, had given commandment to his attendants that his heart and his bones should be conveyed to the convent of the Hermits Friars of S. Augustin, at Clare, in England, but that his flesh and entrails should be solemnly interred beside the grave of that distinguished doctor (St Augustine)', in Milan<sup>6</sup>.

Through his marriage to Elizabeth de Burgh, Lionel and his descendants of the house of York were hereditary founders and patrons of Clare Priory. Although very little of the once extensive medieval heraldic stained glass of the priory now survives, one fragment, in the window beside the south entrance from the little cloister to the prior's lodging, preserves a fifteenth-century depiction of the white rose of York (Figure 45).

The Yorkist royal line of descent passed through Lionel's daughter, Philippa, Countess of March. Philippa may have spent some time in Suffolk, at her ancestral home of Clare Castle. A gold reliquary cross set with pearls, found at the castle site in 1866, was once attributed to her, though modern assessments of the date of this jewel make Philippa's ownership of it an impossibility and, in the light of other evidence, invite a different, but equally interesting, attribution of ownership which is explored below<sup>7</sup>. While this pendant cannot now be regarded as evidence of Philippa's presence at Clare Castle, it nevertheless remains probable that she resided there.

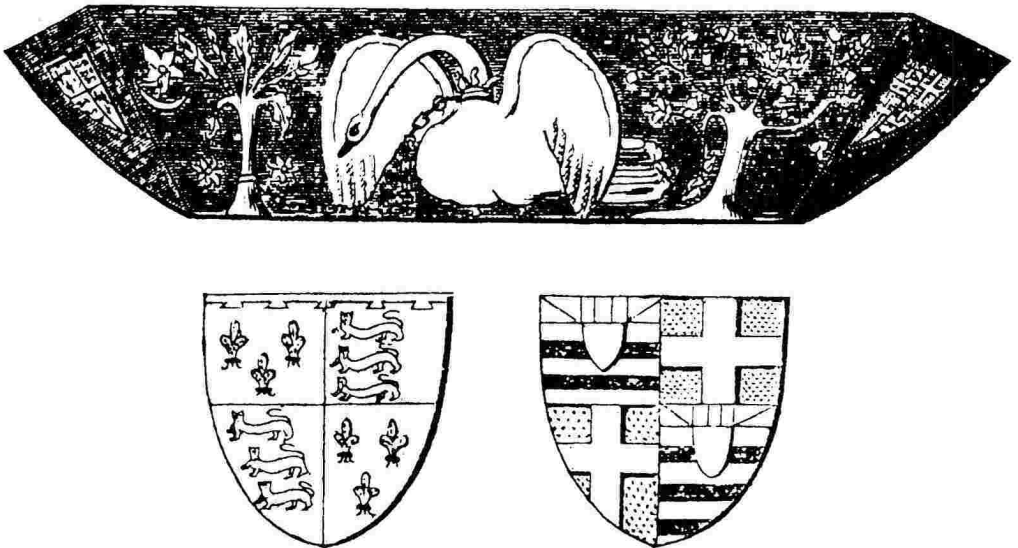


FIG. 46 – Window corbel from Clare with white swan badge and arms of Richard, Earl of Cambridge and Anne Mortimer. *Courtesy of Ipswich Record Office.*

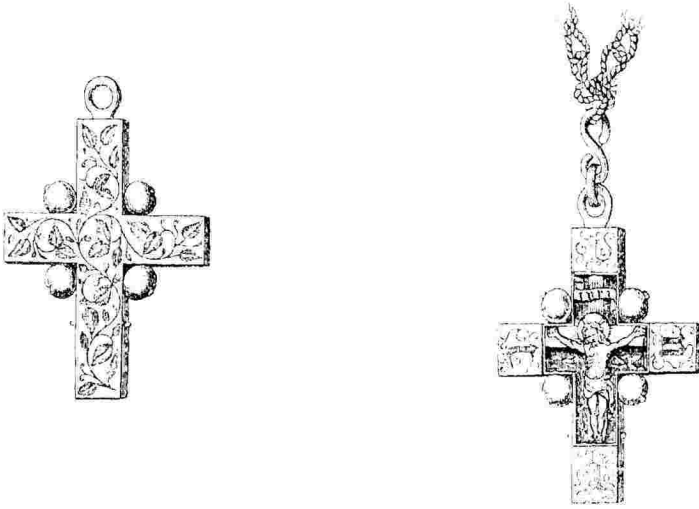


FIG. 47 – Reliquary pectoral cross from Clare Castle, possibly belonging to Cecily Neville.

Philippa's son, Roger Mortimer, was regarded by his descendants as having been the heir of Richard II. Indeed, it has been claimed that Richard II formally recognised Roger as his heir before parliament. There appears to be no evidence of this in the *Rolls of Parliament*.<sup>8</sup> The continuator of the *Eulogium* chronicle, however, says that Roger Mortimer was formally recognised as Richard's heir in 1385. When he claimed the throne in 1460, Richard, Duke of York, did not cite any specific recognition of Roger Mortimer as heir presumptive by Richard II, even if he did describe Roger as Richard's heir.

Roger's death in 1398 (leaving a child as his heir) followed by the usurpation of the first Lancastrian king, Henry IV, in 1399, effectively put an end to the Mortimers' hopes of the crown. Roger's son was Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, and he too lies buried at Clare Priory. He had no children, and the royal line continued through his sister, Anne Mortimer, who married her cousin, Richard of York, Earl of Cambridge. This couple were the parents of Richard, Duke of York (father of Edward IV and Richard III). Their marriage, in 1407, is thought to be commemorated in a carving which once formed part of a fifteenth-century window, almost certainly at Clare Castle. The earliest surviving record of its existence dates from the beginning of the nineteenth century, when it was in use as the corbel of a window on the façade of the Swan Inn. It was taken down in 1809 when the frontage of the inn was rebuilt, and came close to being thrown away. It was rescued by a Mr. Armstead, who recognised its antiquity and had it repainted and replaced on the new inn frontage where it still remains.

The carving displays a swan, royally gorged, flanked by the arms of Richard, Earl of Cambridge, and Anne Mortimer (Figure 46). The swan royally gorged is well-known as a badge of Henry IV, and the representation may, in this instance, refer to Henry since he was king at the time of Richard and Anne's marriage. On the other hand the badge is also recorded as having been used earlier, by

Edward III, the common ancestor of both bride and groom. Its depiction on the Clare carving may therefore be intended as a reference to him.<sup>9</sup>

Early in the reign of Edward IV, on 1 June 1461, 'the castle, manor, lordship and honour of Clare, with the borough of Clare, with appurtenances in the counties of Suffolk, Essex, Norfolk, Hertford and Cambridge and other counties, the manors of Erbury and Hundon, co. Suffolk. . . (and) the town of Sudbury, co. Suffolk' were gifted by the king to his mother, Cecily Neville, dowager Duchess of York.<sup>10</sup> Cecily had numerous other properties, but there is no doubt that she visited Clare Castle during the 1460s, possibly as part of a regular cycle of moves from residence to residence throughout the year. Her steward of the honour of Clare was Sir John Howard of Tendring Hall, cousin of John Mowbray, third duke of Norfolk. John Howard was an important member of the entourage of the Yorkist kings. He became Lord Howard in 1470, and in 1483, following the extinction of the Mowbray line, Richard III elevated him to the dukedom of Norfolk as the first duke of the Howard line. Some of John Howard's household accounts survive, and in them he specifically refers to visits to Cecily Neville at Clare, as for example in 1465: 'Item, the xj day of June my mastyr spent for costys at Clare, whan he rode to my Lady of Yorke, vijj s.'<sup>11</sup>

Cecily Neville's residence at the castle is interesting in the light of the date now assigned to the gold reliquary cross found at the castle site in 1866 (see above and Figure 47). This pectoral cross is of gold, once partially enamelled, with pearls in the arms of the cross. The cross itself is 31mm high and 27mm wide. The length of the gold chain is 600mm. On the obverse is engraved the figure of the crucified Christ, with the background keyed for enamel which is now missing. The extremities of the arms of the cross are pounced with the letters I, N, R, I. The reverse is engraved with foliate decoration. The plate forming the central portion of the front, and engraved with the figure of Christ, can be detached to reveal a cavity which contains a small piece of wood and a small piece of stone. These are thought to be fragments of the True Cross and of the Rock of Calvary. This jewel belongs to the second half of the fifteenth century and was therefore probably lost during Cecily's tenure of Clare Castle. This makes her a possible (and perhaps the most likely) owner of the reliquary, and Cecily's presence at the castle about the period when the reliquary pendant was lost is noted in a recent catalogue entry referring to it.<sup>12</sup>

Additional evidence of the duchess of York's presence at Clare Castle is to be found in an important document preserved in the borough archives of Colchester. This little-known document also reveals that Edward IV visited his mother at Clare Castle on at least one occasion during his reign. The document is a writ in favour of one Richard Mannyng of Halstead, Essex, who 'holds of Cecily, mother of the most Christian Prince Edward by the Grace of God King of England and France (... &c) one messuage with appurtenances in Halsted'. The purpose of the writ is to grant Richard Mannyng exemption from certain dues he would otherwise have owed to the borough authorities in Colchester (which is why a copy is preserved in the borough archives). Significantly the writ was issued 'at Clare, October 8th in the 3rd year of Edward IV (1463)'.<sup>13</sup> Since it clearly emanates from the king in person, it proves that he was at Clare on the date in question.

This was not Edward IV's only visit to Suffolk. He had been expected to spend the Easter of 1462 at Bury St Edmunds, but in the event, seems not to have done so.<sup>14</sup> However, on 5 or 6 June 1469 he left London with the ultimate aim of riding north to deal with the insurrection of Robin of Redesdale. His journey was a leisurely one (ill-advisedly so, as the sequel was to prove) and his route was to include a visit to Norwich and pilgrimages to the shrines of St Edmund and of Our Lady of Walsingham. Since the king arrived in Norwich about 18 June, and was travelling from Bury St Edmunds, he must have been in Bury around the middle of June 1469. His entourage on this occasion included Sir John Howard, Sir Thomas Montgomery (of Faulkbourne, near Witham, Essex), Earl Rivers (father of Queen Elizabeth Woodville) and two of the earl's sons, as well as the king's own younger brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester.<sup>15</sup> The royal party almost certainly stayed at the abbey, which was used to receiving royal visitors, and had special, purpose-built accommodation for them. The Abbot of Bury who received Edward IV was John Boon (d. 1470).

Richard, Duke of Gloucester, had also visited Suffolk, and indeed Bury St Edmunds, on at least

one previous occasion. The event is recorded in Sir John Howard's accounts in what appears to be a draft of a letter. 'Plese you to wete yesterday my lord a Glowseter kame to Kolschester. . . Ferthermor my lord hathe desyred me to be wethe heme ate Sodebery, Lanom (Lavenham) and Seynte Hemondesbery and ferther yeffe I myte; bote I dorste promese heme no ferther'.<sup>16</sup> During this visit to Suffolk, the duke must have passed very close to Clare, and it seems likely that he would have called on his mother, with whom he seems to have enjoyed a close relationship. Explicit proof of such a visit to Clare by Richard is, however, lacking.

The sheriff of the counties of Suffolk and Norfolk in 1464-65, and again in 1480-81, was Alexander Cressener of Preston and Hawkedon, Suffolk. He was a cousin of both Edward IV and Richard III. His mother, Lady Margaret Neville, was an older half-sister of Cecily Neville, Duchess of York. Alexander was knighted at Richard III's coronation in 1483 (Figure 48)<sup>17</sup>. The Cressener homes in Suffolk were not far from Cecily Neville's castle of Clare and her town of Sudbury.<sup>18</sup> Lady Margaret Neville may well have visited her half-sister at Clare, and when she died in 1463 she chose to be buried at Clare Priory. Lady Margaret's son later celebrated his family connection with Richard III by inserting King Richard's arms, impaling those of his wife, Queen Anne Neville (who was also a cousin of Sir Alexander Cressener) in the stained glass of the east window of Hawkedon church, where they survive.<sup>19</sup>

Both Edward IV and Richard III showed favour to Suffolk's county town, Edward granting a charter to Ipswich in 1463 which confirmed earlier charters issued by his predecessors. However, the most highly prized of all the town's charters is the one granted by Richard III on 16 March 1485, for it accorded Ipswich the right to hold admiralty courts in perpetuity.<sup>20</sup>

While no record survives of any royal visits to the shrine of Our Lady of Ipswich (Our Lady of Grace) from the Yorkist period, an important member of the Yorkist royal entourage undoubtedly went on pilgrimage there on more than one occasion. Sir John Howard, whose principal residence was at Stoke-by-Nayland, but who also owned a house in Ipswich, visited the shrine in August 1463, making an offering of 2d. On 5 May 1481 (by which time he was Lord Howard) he expended 10s. on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Ipswich. On 22 January 1482 he was there once again. On this occasion he made an offering of 10d. On 16 August 1483 he visited the shrine once more, this time as duke of Norfolk. He gave 20d. 'for his offering at Owr Lady of Grace', a further 4d. 'to bow on Owr Ladys fote' (i.e. kiss the foot of the image) and 11d. 'in almes at Owr Lady of Grace'.<sup>21</sup>

After the reign of the house of York was ended, Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV and wife of Henry VII, also patronised Our Lady of Ipswich. In 1502 she made a donation of half a gold angel (3s. 4d.) to the Ipswich shrine. In addition, Elizabeth patronised other Suffolk shrines: that of Our Lady of Sudbury (which received 2s. 6d.) and the otherwise little known shrines of Our Lady of Woolpit and Our Lady of Stoke-by-Clare, each of which received 20d.<sup>22</sup>

Uncertainty surrounds the medieval devotion to Our Lady of Woolpit, which is first attested in a mandate issued by the bishop of Norwich in about 1211.<sup>23</sup> The cult reportedly centered in part upon a holy well. This well (currently known as 'The Lady's Well') still exists. It is located on a moated site, now very overgrown with trees, at some distance to the north east of the church. There is no evidence that there was ever a building on this site, and the shrine of Our Lady of Woolpit was undoubtedly located at the parish church. Since the land on which the well is sited was actually held in the middle ages not by Woolpit church but by the chapel of St John at Palgrave, and since no pre-Reformation reference to the spring and its reputed sanctity survives (the earliest extant reference to 'Our Lady's Well' dates from 1557) the Woolpit History Group, in its guide to Woolpit Church, speculates whether there was ever, in fact, any genuine connection between the shrine and the well.<sup>24</sup>

Whatever the real significance of the well, an image of Our Lady was undoubtedly venerated at Woolpit, for a mid-fifteenth-century will speaks of '*tabernaculum beate Marie de novo faciendo*'.<sup>25</sup> In 1443 John Petyt, Rector of Woolpit left a bequest to the shrine which included provision for 'a sceptre to be put in the hand of the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the chapel', and other bequests to adorn the cult statue are also recorded.<sup>26</sup> Various possible locations have been proposed for the shrine chapel which contained this image. The earliest references have been thought to imply that the chapel

was a separate building, free-standing in the churchyard.<sup>27</sup> Later texts, on the other hand, presuppose it to comprise part of the church building. From these facts, together with evidence visible at the site itself, it has been suggested that the shrine chapel may have stood to the north of the present chancel, to which it became attached following the rebuilding of the original twelfth-century chancel in the fourteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

This site is now partially occupied by a nineteenth-century vestry, but traces of the foundations of a larger building remain, as does evidence of the former attachment of such a larger building to the north wall of the chancel. A raised platform surrounds the later vestry. It measures sixteen feet by eighteen feet, which may well represent the dimensions of the vanished chapel. Entrance to the vestry from the chancel is by means of an Early English doorway which predates the present chancel, and which may be the only surviving element of the former shrine chapel.<sup>29</sup> The image of Our Lady was probably removed from the shrine in, or shortly after, 1538. Subsequently a warrant for the demolition of the empty and redundant chapel was issued in 1551 by the Court of Augmentation.<sup>30</sup> This instructed workmen to 'repayre to the chappell. . . called Our Lady of Wulpitt, and the lead therof. . . to take down, cast, wey, and cary (away). . . and to make sale of all the tymber, stone, iron and glasse cuming of the said chappell, to the King's said highnes most advantage'.<sup>31</sup>

Prior to Queen Elizabeth of York's vicarious pilgrimage and oblation, the Woolpit shrine had already received patronage from John, Lord Howard, who offered £7 9s. there in 1481. It is likely that Howard had also patronised Our Lady of Sudbury, for his account books record 'your offering at Sudbery iijjd.' in March 1482.<sup>32</sup> Nothing further seems to be known of the shrine at Stoke-by-Clare, but it was possibly sited at the wealthy chantry college, the last of all the East Anglian religious houses to be closed by Henry VIII.<sup>33</sup>

Elizabeth of York had strong family ties with Sudbury, which had been held by her grandmother, Cecily Neville. However, her patronage of such relatively obscure local cult centres as those at Stoke-by-Clare and Woolpit argues that she must have had quite a detailed knowledge of Suffolk. It may well be that the queen had herself visited all of these Suffolk shrines on some unrecorded occasion. Alternatively, her familiarity with them may perhaps have been derived from her aunt and namesake, the duchess of Suffolk, with whom she is known to have had a close relationship. Nicolas, editing the queen's privy purse expenses, states: 'it is evident from these accounts that she (the duchess of Suffolk) was treated with much attention by her niece the Queen'.<sup>34</sup> His published accounts for Queen Elizabeth of York cover the year 1502-1503. They contain, in that short period, three references to the duchess, recording gifts to her, and payments to various gentlemen for waiting upon her.<sup>35</sup> Coincidentally, the queen's published privy purse expenses cover the last year of the duchess' life, for she seems to have died early in 1503.<sup>36</sup>

This paper has focussed almost exclusively upon the direct connections of members of the house of York with the county of Suffolk, some of which have previously passed unnoticed. There are, however, also important Yorkist links with Suffolk via the Suffolk-based members of the nobility and gentry who served the dynasty and, again, some of them are not well-known. I shall hope to explore those links on another occasion.

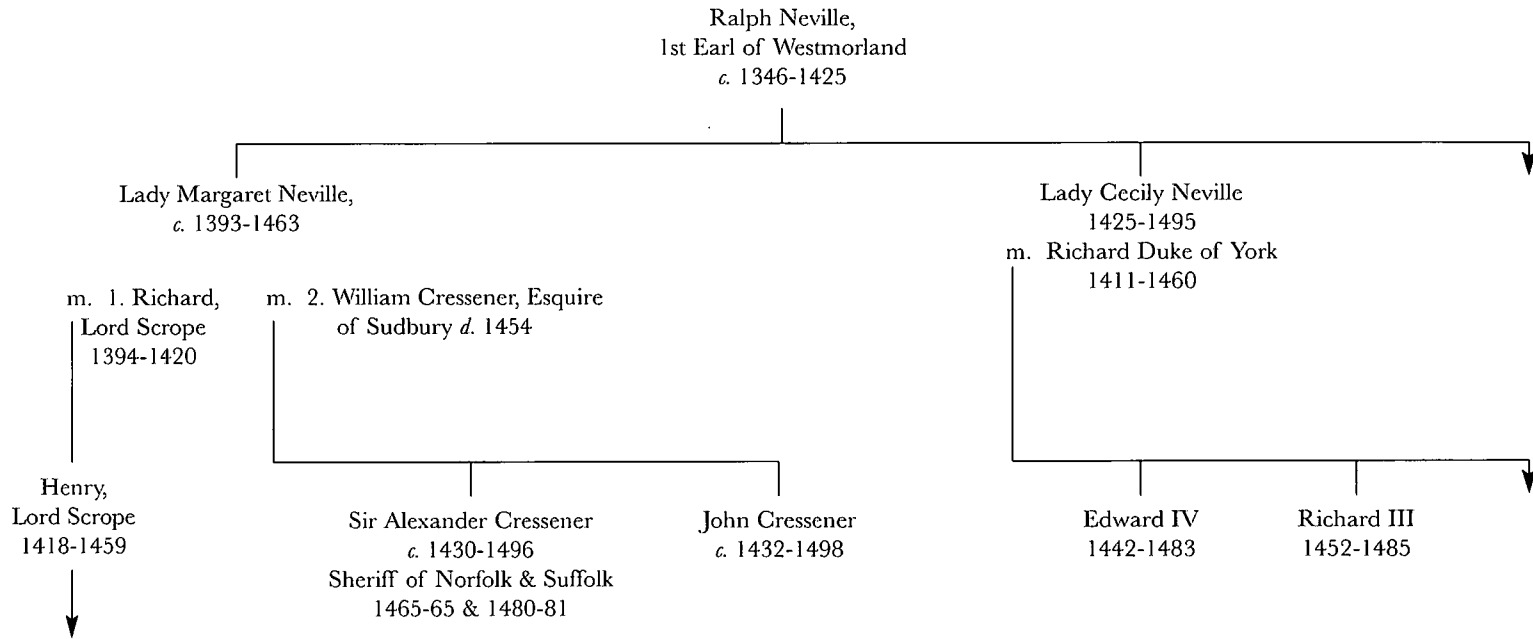


FIG. 48 – The relationship between Sir Alexander Cressener and the house of York

## NOTES

- 1 I am most grateful to Professor Colin Richmond, Dr Rosemary Horrox, Dr Chris Thornton, the staff of the Ipswich Record Office, the staff of Ipswich Museum, James Robinson, of the Department of Prehistory and Early Europe at the British Museum, and the Rev. John Rankin, Vicar of Clare, for their comments and assistance during the writing of this paper.
- 2 Edwards, 1983.
- 3 Very few original funerary monuments to members of the house of York survive. Those buried at Fotheringhay, were moved into new tombs created for them by their descendant, Elizabeth I, towards the end of the sixteenth century. The tomb superstructures of Edward IV, Richard III and Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy are lost. The monument of Anne, Duchess of Exeter, at Windsor, is no more than a small mural brass.
- 4 Most of the white roses now in the church windows are nineteenth-century replacements. The surviving medieval glass has been collected in the west window of the north aisle and includes a number of white roses, together with the de la Pole arms. Elizabeth and her husband were patrons of the living at Stratford St Mary.
- 5 It has, of course, been disputed whether such a senior claim through a female line took precedence over a junior claim through a male line.
- 6 Hingeston, 1858, 105.
- 7 The cross was found by a boy called Walter Lorking at Clare Castle (in the autumn of 1866), during work on the new railway station for the Cambridge to Colchester branch line. Although Philippa's possible ownership has been mooted, the cross was almost immediately recognised to date from the second half of the fifteenth century. It was presented to Queen Victoria and now forms part of the royal collection. It is on permanent loan to the British Museum, where it is currently displayed in gallery 42. Details of the discovery were published in Way, 1868, 60-71.
- 8 The old *DNB* specifically stated that he did this in October 1385. The new *DNB* is more circumspect: 'Richard may have nominated Mortimer as his heir in the Michaelmas parliament of 1385'. I am grateful to Dr. Rosemary Horrox for having drawn my attention to the intriguing issue of Roger Mortimer's recognition as Richard II's heir.
- 9 Almack, 1848, 50-52 and W., 1858, 67. The carving was also illustrated and discussed in *Suffolk Life*, June 1992, p. 30.
- 10 'Erbury' cannot be identified under that name. Since other references in the patent rolls regularly pair the manor of Hundon with that of Sudbury, it seems possible that a reference to Sudbury is intended here, and that a copyist's error has occurred. The gifts of Edward IV to his mother are recorded in *CPR 1461-1467*, 131. They were very extensive, and only those relating to the county of Suffolk are listed here. The selfsame places — 'the Burgh of Clare ... the Lordship or Manor of Erbury, the Lordship or Manor of Hundon, ... the Lordship or Manor of Sudbury' — later constituted the Suffolk portion of the jointure granted by Henry VII to Cecily's grand-daughter, his consort, Elizabeth of York. *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, VI (1472-1503), 462.
- 11 Crawford, 1992, part 1, 295.
- 12 Marks & Williamson, 2003, no. 209 & plate 7.
- 13 'Apud Clare octavo die mensis octubris anno regni Regis Edwardi quarti post conquestum Anglie tercio'. The writ has been published in Benham, 1902, 60. The original Red Paper Book is in the Colchester office of the Essex County Archives. It has been subject to several systems of enumeration. Edward IV's writ is on the folio variously numbered 123v, or C111v, or 84v.
- 14 Davis, 1976, II, 273.
- 15 Kendall, 1972, 73 and 445; Davis, I, 543, letter 333, and 400, introduction to letter 240.
- 16 Crawford, 1992, part 1, 580-81. The preserved copy of the letter appears to be a draft, and contains crossings out and substitutions. It is unfortunately dated only to the feast of St Mary Magdalene (22 July), no year being given. It would seem from its context to have been written in 1466 or 1467, and the editor of the Howard accounts suggests that it was intended to be a letter from Howard to the duke of Norfolk, although this is not certain and it could have been intended as a letter to Howard, perhaps from one of his servants. Sir John Howard was the Constable of Colchester Castle. It is therefore possible that he would have received Gloucester in person during the latter's visit to Colchester.
- 17 Horrox & Hammond, 1979-1983, III, 11. For details of this relationship see the family tree.
- 18 From Clare, Hawkedon is 8km north, and Preston 18km east north east.
- 19 I am indebted to Mark Dobson for first drawing my attention to the east window at Hawkedon church.
- 20 Ipswich Record Office, C/1/1/16.
- 21 Crawford, 1992, part 1, 219; part 2, 62, 153, 445.
- 22 Nicolas, 1830, 3. The payments were made on her behalf by William Barton, priest, to whom the money was paid in March 1502.
- 23 Woolpit History Group, (n.d.), 2; Paine, 1993, 8.
- 24 Woolpit History Group, (n.d.), 8. Abbot Ralph of Coggeshall in Essex recounted in the twelfth century a story of two remarkable green children who were found near the mouth of a deep hole in Woolpit. This might possibly be an early reference to the Woolpit holy well, or to the deep moat which surrounds its site. See Scarfe, 1986, 116, and Skeat, 1913, 125.
- 25 Pevsner, 1961, 503.
- 26 Paine, 1993, 8.
- 27 Woolpit History Group, (n.d.), 3, citing the wills of Simon Brown (1390) and John Petyt (1442). Paine, 1993, 9, however, has reservations on the subject.



- 28 Such a development at Woolpit would approximate to that of the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, in Norfolk, where archaeological evidence proves that the shrine chapel was originally a free-standing building to the north of the priory church, to which, in the course of later rebuilding, it became attached. Green & Whittingham, 1969, 255-290.
- 29 Paine, 1993, 9.
- 30 Woolpit History Group,(n.d.), 3.
- 31 Paine, 1993, 9-10.
- 32 Crawford, 1992, part 2, 57, 166.
- 33 MacCulloch, 1986, 32, 138, 143, 163.
- 34 Nicolas, 1830, 111.
- 35 Nicolas, 1830, 9, 86, 88.
- 36 Nicolas, 1830, 88, 111.

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