

THE STEWARDSHIP OF THE LIBERTY OF THE EIGHT AND A HALF HUNDREDS

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The temporal jurisdiction of the Abbot of Bury St. Edmunds extended over almost the whole of West Suffolk, the Eight and a Half Hundreds which comprised this Liberty being those of Thingoe, Thedwastre, Lackford, Risbridge, Blackbourn and Babergh—these last two each counting as a double hundred—and the half hundred of Cosford. Since the dissolution of the Abbey this part of Suffolk has remained a distinct region for purposes of local administration and, with Exning, now forms the modern administrative county of West Suffolk.

According to tradition, the Liberty was granted to the Abbey by Edward the Confessor.¹ A steward was appointed to administer it in much the same way as the sheriff acted for the county, the Liberty as a separate franchise being normally excluded from the sheriff's jurisdiction. As the sheriff administered the county on behalf of the king, so the steward of a liberty administered the area exempted from the sheriff's sphere of duties, but only for so long as he did so satisfactorily. Among the duties of the steward was the return of writs to the sheriff, arrest and custody of prisoners, holding the courts of the Liberty and of each hundred, and general administration of the area on behalf of the abbot, who himself held the Liberty from the Crown. The steward was not concerned with administration of the abbey estates but with the good government of the whole Liberty and maintenance of law and order. The annual accounting to the Exchequer which elsewhere was made by the sheriff was here to be made by the steward.²

The office was a serjeanty, at first held with the manors of Lidgate in Suffolk and Blunham in Bedfordshire, but ownership of the manors did not always remain with later holders of the office. The first Steward known was Ralph, who was granted the manors by William I, to hold them from the abbot of Bury as overlord, by the service of steward.³ The manors were later granted by Abbot Albold to Maurice de Windsor (c. 1115–19) to hold by the same service,⁴ and the office became hereditary, Maurice's nephew,

¹ *Hundred Rolls*, (Record Commission, 1812–18), vol. II, p. 143.

² Bodleian MS. Ch. Suff., a. 2. (134).

³ B[ritish] M[useum] Add. 19102, fol. 327, and *Victoria County History of Bedfordshire*, vol. III, p. 228.

⁴ B.M. Add. 19102, fol. 327. The grant, with slight differences, is referred to by Abbot Samson in H. E. Butler, *Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond*, (1949), p. 27.

Ralph de Hastings, being his successor. The Hastings family continued to hold the office until the latter part of the fourteenth century. The office was not normally exercised by the steward himself but by a deputy or under-steward appointed by him. During the minorities of heirs, which occurred frequently in the Hastings family, the office escheated to the Crown and was usually either granted temporarily to a kinsman of the king or to another magnate or was, for a consideration, granted to the ward although still under age, as happened with Lawrence de Hastings in 1335,⁵ and with John in 1387.⁶ Another cause of a change of steward and sometimes also of under-steward, was forfeiture to the Crown on rebellion, as in 1266, when, Henry de Hastings having supported Simon de Montfort against Henry III, his possessions were granted to the Clare family.⁷

On the death of John de Hastings in 1389 the hereditary Stewardship appears to have descended to his heir general, Lord Grey of Ruthin, and to William Beauchamp.⁸ After the death of Sir Edward Neville in 1476 no mention of the holders of the office has been found until 1528, when an under-steward is mentioned.⁹ There are references to Thomas Howard, 3rd Duke of Norfolk, as steward of 'the franchises of Bury' in 1536¹⁰ and 1546,¹¹ in which in the latter year he was said to 'have an inheritance'.¹²

Members of the Howard family were holders of other positions of trust in Suffolk long before the title to the Stewardship itself passed to the family. A John Howard had been one of the com-

⁵ *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, [hereafter cited as C.P.R.] 9 Edw. III, Part I, p. 124.

⁶ C.P.R. 1387, p. 291.

⁷ C.P.R. 1266, p. 621.

⁸ The succession to the estates was disputed for many years. Grey and Beauchamp came to an understanding as to the various estates of the Earl of Pembroke (Lord Bergavenny) after an attempt by the father of the last Hastings earl to prevent their reversion to Grey by entailing them on Beauchamp had been nullified by the birth of the last earl. This is discussed by R. I. Jack, 'Entail and Descent; The Hastings Inheritance', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. xxxviii, No. 97, (May 1965), pp. 1-19.

⁹ Thomas Jermy, mentioned by the Duke of Norfolk in a letter to Wolsey. *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, vol. iv, Part 2, pp. 1781-2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. xi, p. 253, no. 642.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. xxi, Part 2, p. 289, no. 556.

¹² It is not clear to the present writer how the Stewardship came into the hands of the Howard Dukes of Norfolk. The statement that the third Duke had 'an inheritance' in the Franchises, may merely mean that his father or grandfather purchased it after the death of Sir Edward Neville. It may, however, be that the Howards succeeded, after extinction of the male Beauchamp line (on whom William Beauchamp entailed the Abergavenny lands), through Margaret Mowbray, wife of Sir Robert Howard and eventual co-heir of Anne Mowbray (*d.* 1481), the great granddaughter of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, by his first wife; Richard being heir male to his uncle, William Beauchamp. This is merely a tentative guess, based on a study of the pedigrees. (See *Complete Peerage*, vol. i, Abergavenny, pp. 28, 41, vol. ix, Norfolk, pp. 612-13).

mission appointed to arrest the besiegers of the abbey after the riots of 1327,¹³ and Sir John, later the first Howard Duke of Norfolk, was Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk in 1461.¹⁴ John Howard is mentioned as Steward in 1404,¹⁵ and is probably the Sir John Howard to whom the abbot referred after his death, as having when he was under-steward done 'sharp execution against rebels and misdoers . . . [he] sometime with two hundred horse took misdoers and rebels and led them to prison and there kept them as law would.' The abbot compared his good rule with the lawlessness which followed.¹⁶ This was probably either John, father of Sir Robert Howard, who died in 1436, or the former's son by his first wife, also Sir John, who predeceased his father in 1409.

In 1567 Thomas, 4th Duke of Norfolk, granted the office of deputies jointly¹⁷ to Thomas Kytson of Hengrave and Thomas Andrewes, the latter a justice of the peace and a governor of Bury Grammar School.¹⁸ The Stewardship remained in the hands of the Howard family until 1688, when it was sold by James, 3rd Earl of Suffolk, to Lord Jermyn for £1,100. Half the purchase money was supplied by Thomas Folkes of Rushbrook, who was to hold a moiety of the office, the whole then being leased to him for twenty-five years for a payment of twenty pounds. The profits of the office appear to have been estimated at seventy pounds, since Lord Jermyn was to receive thirty-five pounds annually for his moiety. In 1697 Folkes conveyed his share to Bartholomew Paman, junior, of Bury St. Edmunds, for £800, though he was to continue in the other moiety for Paman's benefit; the office was still to be held in Lord Jermyn's name.¹⁹

In 1722 Ann Paman, Bartholomew's widow, sold her share to Sir Robert Davers of Rushbrook and his wife Mary, daughter of Lord Jermyn, for £600, to the intent that 'the said Office . . . may in time be re-united and entirely revested in the Blood and Family' of Lord Jermyn.²⁰ On the death of Sir Charles Davers, the last baronet, in 1806, the Stewardship descended to Frederick, fifth Earl and later first Marquis of Bristol, as heir through his mother, Elizabeth, sister of Sir Charles, and has remained in the Hervey

¹³ C.P.R. 1 Edw. III, Part III, p. 214.

¹⁴ See also C.P.R. 1462, p. 203.

¹⁵ *Calender of Fine Rolls*, vol. XII, p. 245.

¹⁶ Bodleian MS. Ch. Suff. a.2. (134).

¹⁷ West Suffolk Record Office: 449/7/2. This grant is in the Hengrave papers, where there is also a 'Taske Book' or tax list for the Liberty in 1600 (449/7/21).

¹⁸ I am indebted to Mr. D. Alderton for this information on Andrewes.

¹⁹ Deeds and abstract of title to the Stewardship at Ickworth: Box I, Bundle 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

family. A list of the families holding the office is printed below.²¹

Holders of leases of the office for life, with the names of deputies or under-stewards, are in a second list. According to a statement made after the death of John de Hastings in 1375 the Hastings family had 'from time immemorial' appointed under-stewards for life. The under-steward received six shillings and eightpence from the abbot for every court of the Liberty held within the abbey every three weeks.²² The under-steward was sometimes related to the Hastings family, as was Hugh Pecche, whose wife, Ida, was sister of Henry de Hastings. Pecche is described as Steward when witnessing a deed, and may therefore have held the Stewardship itself as owner of the manor of Blunham during his wife's life.²³

The office was one for which Ralph of Bocking, a man prominent in Suffolk, was willing to grant a Wiltshire manor, in return, receiving it for life before the death of John de Hastings in 1325.²⁴ Ralph was active in the county in other capacities; in 1327 he was appointed, with John of Tendring, to hold the town of Bury St. Edmunds for the king after the riots of the townsmen against the Abbey,²⁵ in 1335 he was on the Commission of Array in Suffolk,²⁶ in 1341 he was one of the collectors of the tax of a ninth in the county,²⁷ and was on the commission of Oyer and Terminer in 1354.²⁸ His absorption in the administration of the county was recognised during these years by several orders from the Crown to the Exchequer officials to admit his attorneys to render his account for the issues of the Stewardship, he himself being engaged on 'divers affairs of the king in the county'.²⁹ Although he held the office for life, the stewardship was in the hands of the Crown on Lawrence de Hastings's minority. Ralph granted the office to Sir

²¹ The holders of the office were discussed by Miss L. J. Redstone in *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, xv, (1913), pp. 200-211. An annotated offprint of that paper in the West Suffolk Record Office bears her later alterations. The later holders of the office were not then known in complete succession for the 17th and 18th centuries. Dr. H. M. Cam, in *Liberties and Communities in Medieval England*, (1963 ed.), pp. 189-193, also mentions the descent of the office. It is possible that the present list may include deputy stewards of the Liberty of the town of Bury St. Edmunds, a separate and distinct franchise. Miss Redstone's paper mentions Nicholas Bacon, who held the town Liberty.

²² *Calendar of Inquisitions post mortem*, vol. xiv, pp. 147-8.

²³ West Suffolk Record Office; 449/2/347 and *V. C. H. Bedfordshire*, vol. III, p. 229.

²⁴ 1327: inspeximus and confirmation of charter of 6 December 1324; C.P.R. 1 Edw. III, Part 3, p. 188.

²⁵ C.P.R. 1 Edw. III, Part 3, p. 214.

²⁶ *Calendar of Close Rolls*, [hereafter cited as C.C.R.] 1335, p. 470.

²⁷ C.C.R. 1342, p. 463.

²⁸ C.P.R. 1354, p. 121.

²⁹ C.P.R. 5 Edw. III, Part II, pp. 204-5; *ibid.*, 1335, p. 289; C.C.R. 1355, pp. 70 and 482; C.P.R. 1341, pp. 313 and 316; *ibid.*, 1342, p. 472; C.C.R. 1342, p. 659.

William of Rushbrook in 1355, with a proviso secured from Edward III for its retention by Sir William in the event of the death of Ralph before the end of the minority of Lawrence's heir, John.³⁰

Later under-stewards reflect in their appointments the politics of the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Thomas Morieux, who was Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk in 1354-55 and 1366-68, was a son-in-law of John of Gaunt.³¹ John Dureward was an adherent of the Lancastrians.³² Sir Thomas Mortimer, appointed by Lord Grey of Ruthin and William Beauchamp,³³ was ordered to be arrested soon after the arrest of Beauchamp's brother, Thomas, Earl of Warwick, one of the Lords Appellant, in 1397.³⁴ In the following year Sir John Bussy, Speaker of the House of Commons and a supporter of Richard II, was confirmed in the office of under-steward, of which he had obtained a grant in reversion from feoffees appointed by the late John de Hastings.³⁵

Like the Sheriff's office, the Stewardship gradually became a position honourable but devoid of almost all duties. One of its last remaining functions was the right to appoint a coroner for the Liberty, which was still exercised in the nineteenth century. It may also be of interest to note that a modern seal of the Liberty is attached to a deed of 1870, at Ickworth.³⁶

I am grateful for the help given to me by the County Records Committee of the West Suffolk County Council and the County Archivist, Mr. M. P. Statham, M.A., in access to documents.

STEWARDS OF THE LIBERTY

<i>Temp.</i> William I	Ralph. ³⁷
c. 1115/9-1389	Maurice de Windsor ³⁸ and the Hastings family (with exceptions during minorities, etc. See below).
1251-1253	Guy de Lusignan. ³⁹
1266	Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester. ⁴⁰
1267	T. Bygod, Robert de Norton, Robert of Bradfield and Henry of Cockfield, guardians of the Liberty. ⁴¹

³⁰ C.P.R. 1355, p. 201.

³¹ T. F. Tout, *Chapters in Administrative History*, vol. III, p. 397.

³² C.C.R. 1391, pp. 268 and 374; C.P.R. 1391, p. 485. Dureward appears to have been deputy to Edward, son of the Duke of York, though mention of him as steward of the abbey and warden of the gaol in 1393 may mean that he was steward of the town liberty only: C.P.R. 1393, p. 305.

³³ C.P.R. 1393, p. 301 and 1395, p. 601.

³⁴ W. Stubbs, *Constitutional History of England*, (1883), vol. II, p. 518.

³⁵ C.P.R. 1398, pp. 278-9.

³⁶ Ickworth deeds: C 26, bundle B.

- 1269 William de Valence (wardship).⁴²
 1390 Edward of York.⁴³
 1393 Reynold, Lord Grey of Ruthin, and William Beauchamp,⁴⁴ followed by William's widow, Joan (d. 1435),⁴⁵ and granddaughter, Elizabeth (d. 1448),⁴⁶ the latter's husband, Sir Edward Neville, claiming after her death, as holding 'by the courtesy' of England (d. 1476).⁴⁷
 By 1536 Thomas Howard, 3rd Duke of Norfolk,⁴⁸ and his successors, Duke of Norfolk and Earls of Suffolk.
 1688 Thomas, Lord Jermyn ⁴⁹ (and Thomas Folkes).
 1697 Lord Jermyn (and Bartholomew Paman).⁴⁹
 1722 Sir Robert Davers.⁴⁹
 1806 Frederick, 5th Earl of Bristol.

UNDER-STEWARDS AND HOLDERS OF LIFE GRANTS, ETC.

- c.* 1188 Gilbert.⁵⁰
 1188 Robert de Flamaville.⁵¹
c. 1247? Hugh Pecche.⁵²
 Aug. 1250 Walter de Thurkilbi.⁵³
 Nov. 1250 Thomas de Emmegrave.⁵⁴
ante 1254 Robert de Vallibus.⁵⁵
 1262 Robert de Fulham.⁵⁶
 13th cent. Sir Jordan de Saqueville.⁵⁷
c. 1275 Ralph de Wirham.⁵⁸
c. 1290? John Paynel.⁵⁹
c. 1293 Robert le Verdun.⁶⁰
c. 1295? Roger of Martlesham.⁶¹
 1324 Ralph of Bocking.⁶²
 1355-1359 Sir William of Rushbrook.⁶³
 (or later)
c. 1383-*c.* 1387 Thomas Morieux.⁶⁴
 1386 John Heth (deputy of Morieux).⁶⁵
c. 1370 Ralph of Walsham.⁶⁶
ante 1375 Thomas Moor or More.⁶⁷
 1375 John de Herlyng.⁶⁸
 1391 John Dureward ⁶⁹ (Edmund of Lakenheath, deputy).⁷⁰
 1393-1397 Thomas Mortimer.⁷¹
 1397 Robert Thorley ⁷² (Laurence Trusbut had commission of the under-stewardship, September 1397).⁷³
 1398 Sir John Bussy.⁷⁴

- 1404 John Howard.⁷⁵
 1430 or 1431 Bartholomew Brokesby.⁷⁶
 1528 Thomas Jermy.⁷⁷
 1567 Thomas Kytson and Thomas Andrewes.⁷⁸
 c. 1589 John Wentworth.⁷⁹
 1676 John Catesby.⁸⁰
 1686 Robert Cosens⁸¹ (Jonathan Perry, deputy for three years.)⁸²

³⁷ B.M. Add. 19102, fol. 327. Dates are of mentions of Stewards, not necessarily of length of office.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ C.P.R. 1253, pp. 200, 207.

⁴⁰ C.P.R. 1266, p. 621.

⁴¹ C.P.R. 1267, p. 56.

⁴² C.P.R. 1269, p. 323.

⁴³ C.P.R. 1390, p. 176.

⁴⁴ C.P.R. 1393, p. 301 and 1395, p. 601.

⁴⁵ P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice] C/139/76 no. 26.

⁴⁶ P.R.O. C/140/58/14.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, vol. xi, p. 253, no. 642 and vol. xx1, Part 2, p. 289, no. 556.

⁴⁹ Deeds and abstract of title to the Stewardship, at Ickworth: Box I, bundle 4.

⁵⁰ Jocelin mentions a 'simple and ignorant steward' named Gilbert, appointed during Henry de Hastings's minority. H. E. Butler, *Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond*, (1949), p. 27.

⁵¹ B.M. Add. 19102.

⁵² West Suffolk Record Office: 449/2/347.

⁵³ C.P.R. 1250, p. 72.

⁵⁴ C.P.R. 1250, p. 80.

⁵⁵ C.C.R. 1254, p. 98.

⁵⁶ C.P.R. 1262, p. 204. This may be the town Liberty.

⁵⁷ West Suffolk Record Office: 449/2/349. This is an undated deed, probably of the 13th century.

⁵⁸ *Calendar of Charter Rolls*, vol. II, p. 190.

⁵⁹ Lord Francis Hervey, *The Pinchbeck Register*, vol. I, p. 465.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 461-3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 462-3.

⁶² See note 24. Miss Redstone mentioned the presentation by the elder John de Hastings of Sir Geoffrey Burdelys as his deputy on 22 March 1315.

⁶³ C.P.R. 1355, p. 201.

⁶⁴ C.P.R. 1383, p. 227. He died before May 1387.

⁶⁵ C.P.R. 1391, p. 386.

⁶⁶ *Calendar of Inquisitions post mortem*, vol. xiv, pp. 147-8.

⁶⁷ Moor had a grant of the office in reversion on the death of Ralph Walsham, from feoffees of the elder John de Hastings. C.P.R. 1398, pp. 278-9.

⁶⁸ Described as the king's esquire; he was allowed to appoint deputies, and was still described as Bailiff of the Liberty in June 1378. C.P.R. 1375, pp. 186-7 and 193; 1378, pp. 235 and 252.

⁶⁹ This may be the John Durward who was later Speaker of the House of Commons. C.C.R. 1391, pp. 268 and 374. See note 70.

⁷⁰ Mention of him as 'keeping the place' of John Dureward as steward of the abbey and warden of the gaol may imply that this was the town stewardship. C.P.R. 1393, p. 305.

- ⁷¹ C.P.R. 1393, p. 301; 1395, p. 601.
⁷² The king's esquire. C.P.R. 1397, p. 226.
⁷³ B.M. MS. Cott. Tib. B. ix fol. 87v-88 (54v-55).
⁷⁴ Speaker of the House of Commons. C.P.R. 1398, pp. 278-9.
⁷⁵ *Calendar of Fine Rolls*, vol. xii, p. 245.
⁷⁶ P.R.O. C/139/76 no. 26.
⁷⁷ *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, vol. iv, Part 2, pp. 1781-2.
⁷⁸ West Suffolk Record Office: 449/7/2.
⁷⁹ A fifty-year lease as trustee for the Howard family. P.R.O. E/134/40.
⁸⁰ Bodleian MS. Ch. Suff. a.2. (185).
⁸¹ Ickworth: Box I, bundle 4.
⁸² *Ibid.* Appointed by Richard Newman who held in trust for Cosens.