

THE TASBURGHS OF SOUTH ELMHAM: THE RISE AND FALL OF A SUFFOLK GENTRY FAMILY

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THERE SEEMS NO reason to doubt Suckling's assertion (1846, 197) that the Tasburgh family originated in the village of that name not far south of Norwich. It is, however, far more difficult to establish the point at which a Norfolk trading family established a presence some twenty miles south-east of their home, across the Waveney, in South Elmham. The 15th-century Calendars of Close Rolls mention a John Tasburgh on several occasions, but there is no proof of any connection with the South Elmham family. The records of the Norwich Guild of St George show that a John Tasburgh was an officer of the gild in 1451 and that he was alderman of the gild in 1455-56 (Grace, 1937, 44, 49). The probability of this man being connected with the Suffolk Tasburghs is much higher, and he may have been the John Tasburgh who died in 1473 (see below, p. 278) and owned a house in the Norwich parish of St Peter Parmentergate. In 1441-42 a Thomas Tasburgh, fuller, was a freeman of Norwich, and may well have been the father of the John mentioned above, whose own eldest son was named Thomas (Rye, 1888, 135). The account rolls for 1436-39 of the Master of the Cellar of Norwich Priory record three payments of 13s. 4d. to a John Tasburgh; on two occasions he is described as 'our attorney in London'.¹ He could well be the same man as the officer of the Guild of St George. Many an English landed family owed its origins to a lawyer or to a merchant.

The Tasburgh pedigree printed by Suckling (1846, 198) from Harleian MS 1560 begins with a Thomas who was alive in the reign of Edward III, and who married the heiress of the Toll family. Farrer (1928, 60) points out that in 1327 one of the seven largest taxpayers in South Elmham was John Tolle, and he suggests that a Tasburgh married the heiress of a Toll and moved to South Elmham sometime in the 14th century. His suggestion that it was marriage with a Toll heiress that brought the Tasburghs to South Elmham may well be correct, but a 15th-century date seems more probable than one in the 14th century, and certainly it is in that century that our first definite evidence of a Tasburgh connection with the parish appears.

On 5 January 1445 John Toll of the town of South Elmham made over to John Tasburgh of Norwich his 'mancon', farm and land, and all his household stuff, except what belonged to his daughter, Margaret Wymer. In return he was to receive for the rest of his life lodging, meat, drink, fire and candles suitable to his degree, and similar provision for his servant and a horse.² John Toll's will is dated just over a month later, and made John Tasburgh the chief executor.³ The only child mentioned in this will is Margaret Wymer, and there is no explanation of why he made over the greater part of his possessions to Tasburgh. In the absence of more concrete evidence, it must be assumed either that the latter had married another of Toll's daughters or that Toll had somehow become indebted to him.

From the following year, 1446, there survives a lease for seven years by John Tasburgh of South Elmham of some land and cows and the major part of a house to one Walter Seman. John Tasburgh reserved the right to use the hall, kitchen and bakehouse whenever he came to live at South Elmham.⁴ As well as a hall the house is described as having a pantry and buttery at the north end with a chamber over them, and a chamber and solar at the south end of the hall; the kitchen and bakehouse appear to have been in a separate building. It is likely that this house was St Peter's Hall, and its layout seems to be that of a typical late medieval house.

Amongst the wills of the Norwich Consistory Court preserved in the Norfolk Record Office is that of a John Tasburgh, made in 1473, describing him as being 'of St Peter South Elmham' and leaving to his eldest son, Thomas, his head messuage, formerly called Tollys. It seems probable that this is the John who had made the agreement with John Toll in 1445.⁵ When his widow, Margery Tasburgh, made her will in 1485, all five of her sons were still living.⁶ Little is known of the eldest, not even the date of his death, and his will has not survived. The only documents which refer to Thomas are leases such as that of 1479 by which he leased land from Flixton Priory.⁷

Thanks to the survival, among the archives of the Adair family, of one of his account books⁸ we are, however, on much surer ground with John Tasburgh II, who died in 1509. The book, which shows him buying and selling land, cattle, cheese and wood, gives the impression of a good businessman. It is valuable also in that it contains a draft of his will, dated 27 March 1507 and written by himself when he first bought the book. His numerous bequests to churches and monasteries included five marks for a new rood loft in the church of South Elmham St Peter, 13s. 4d. for the repair of Flixton Priory and four bushels of wheat to be used for repairs to Dunwich Blackfriars. The bulk of his land was left to his eldest son. His younger son, Edward (who later married Rose Harman of Ipswich and founded the family of Tasburgh of Ilketshall) was to receive forty pounds and certain land bought from the testator's uncle, 'Master Edward Tasburgh', a priest. The bulk of his land was, however, to pass to his eldest son, thus ensuring that the estate remained intact. His wife, Olyve, was to be left the manor of Boyse until their eldest son came of age and, as long as she remained a widow, she was to 'have hyr dwellyng in my place yt is to say ye parlor with ye kechyn & on of ye garette chawmberes' and 'to have ye lytyll howse undyr the whette chamber to ley hyr beest'.

The will also contains a reference to the disposal of Tasburgh's household stuff in London. This may tie in with the few pages of the accounts which are written in a different hand and include an entry referring to the purchase of some steers while 'Mr Tasburgh was at London'. It is possible that the goods in London were in the house that had belonged to Edmund Tasburgh, who had a brother called John and whose will made in 1497 described him as a gentleman of St Myldrede Poultry.⁹

Sadly, the son, John Tasburgh III, remains a more shadowy figure than his father. No account books or other personal documents have survived. It is clear from his father's will that he was under age in 1509, and it was in 1524, over fourteen years after his father's death, that he married Alice, daughter and co-heiress of the late William Dybney of Garboldisham.¹⁰ That he developed an involvement in public affairs we know from his appearance in 1540 in the list of escheators for England and Wales (Wood, 1971, 90). He was also a Commissioner for Sewers. In 1547 a John Tasburgh, armiger and grocer, is recorded as a freeman of Norwich (Rye, 1888, 135), and it seems probable that this is John Tasburgh III, described in a release of 1551 as of the City of Norwich.¹¹ Like his forbears, he had both commercial and landowning interests, and in this latter respect continued the policy of gradually building up the family estate. In 1544 he acquired the manor of Flixton late Priory, thus becoming the owner of both manors in this parish.

It is not clear when the Tasburghs moved from St Peter's Hall to Flixton Abbey, nor how long they lived at the latter before building or enlarging Flixton Hall. In the summer of 1539 a number of Norwich stone masons worked at 'Mr Tasborowe's house at South Elmham'.¹² Assuming that this was St Peter's Hall and not Flixton Abbey, may not this date the insertion of the ecclesiastical windows, porch and flushwork panels at the former house? Farrer (1928, 71) believed that these ecclesiastical features were either added to the house by

John Tasburgh I, who died in 1473, or came from the Tasburgh chapel in St Peter's church when it fell into decay after the Reformation. He based his second suggestion on a belief that the family had no sympathy with the reformed religion, but this is a false assumption. It has also been suggested that the windows came from the church of South Elmham St Nicholas which fell into ruin during the 16th century. It does not, however, seem that this church decayed sufficiently early for this to be true; its burial ground was still in use at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. The Tasburgh chapel at St Peter's is unlikely to have been large enough to have provided all the ecclesiastical features to be seen at St Peter's Hall. A more likely source for them is the dissolved Flixton Priory. This did not come into the possession of the Tasburghs until five years after 1539, but they may have bought the materials from the then owner of the buildings, Richard Wharton.

Alice Tasburgh died before her husband, dividing between her two younger sons, Owen and William, most of the Dybney family lands in Garboldisham which she had brought to the Tasburghs. John took as his second wife Elizabeth, daughter of John Davy of Norwich, who bore him one son, Thomas, whose career will be dealt with later. John Tasburgh IV, eldest child of the first marriage had been born in 1533, and when his father died in 1552 he was still under age.¹³ He received livery of his estates in February 1555, but all that was then actually in his possession was the property called Tolles (probably St Peter's Hall), consisting of a messuage and garden and 170 acres of land, mainly pasture.¹⁴ The manors of Flixton late Priory and Flixton Boyse formed the jointure estate of John's widow, Elizabeth, who, about two years after her husband's death, married Francis Clovell of Hanningfield, Essex. Her stepson seems not to have approved of the way she managed the estate, and later brought a suit against her accusing her of wasting the property by felling large numbers of trees and by pulling down 'an Inne'.¹⁵ By the spring of 1563 Francis Clovell had died and in the autumn of 1565 John Tasburgh IV held his first court as lord of the manor of Flixton late Priory. An agreement made on 15 May 1565 shows that Elizabeth had remarried yet again, this time to Edward Moone of Malbye, Norfolk, and it seems likely that she gave up her life interest in the Flixton estate to her stepson.¹⁶ In any case she was dead by October 1567.

Meanwhile John Tasburgh IV had married, before his father's death, Elizabeth Trace or Tracey of Norwich, and in 1558 settled on her, with reversion to their heirs, the same two manors in Flixton which were his stepmother's jointure.¹⁷ Like the Tasburghs, the Trace family were Norwich merchants. Until he died in 1544 Elizabeth's father John was an active member and official of the Gild of St George (Grace, 1937, 141-153), living in the parish of St Andrew and describing himself in his will as a citizen and alderman of Norwich.¹⁸ When he made his will all five of his children were under age and his wife was carrying a sixth child. He made many charitable bequests and provided that his money should go to educating scholars at Cambridge if all his children died. The posthumous child and one of his elder brothers were both called John. The elder of these two entered Lincoln's Inn in October 1566, was called to the bar in 1577 and seems to have followed a legal career (Foster, 1896, 74). References to him in a number of documents make it clear that he managed his Tasburgh brother-in-law's legal and business affairs and that he had chambers at Lincoln's Inn. For instance, in 1588 John Tasburgh wrote to 'my very good brother Mr Trace' at Lincoln's Inn about the proposed marriage between his daughter and Mr Ashfield of Stowlangtoft, asking him, together with his half-brother Thomas Tasburgh, to settle the arrangements about his daughter's dowry and jointure.¹⁹ The letter was written from Wydiall in Hertfordshire, the home of his wife's sister, Joan, and her husband John Gill. The relationship between the Gill and Tasburgh families was close and affectionate: they acted as godparents for each other's children and frequently visited each other. The Gills were a leading Puritan gentry family in their own county, and it seems likely that the Tasburghs held similar views.

The Trace family were also Puritan in their sympathies. The younger John Trace pursued an academic career and became President of Caius; he was an executor of the will of Dr Caius in 1573. His own will, made in 1579, is full of Puritan expressions, and he left bequests of rings to several of his Gill and Tasburgh connections, including Thomas Tasburgh and 'my cosyn' Thomas Bateman.²⁰ This last was in fact a rather distant connection by marriage; Thomas's brother had married John Tasburgh's sister. The elder John Trace survived his brother by 25 years, and he too made many bequests to the families of his two sisters; he appears to have been unmarried.²¹ His gift of money to the poor of the parishes of Flixton and South Elmham St Peter indicates that he must have been a frequent visitor there.

A surviving letter from John Tasburgh IV to John Trace, written in 1601, is distinctly Puritan in tone and is mainly concerned with instructions about the collection of debts owing to the writer.²² A further indication of the family's Puritan leanings at this stage is John Tasburgh IV's choice of the newly ordained Thomas Daynes as vicar of Flixton in 1588. Two years later Daynes was deprived of his living for Puritan practices. The evidence given by witnesses in the Norwich Consistory Court shows him refusing to use the prayer book, to wear a surplice, to make the sign of the cross in baptism or to church women. He appears to have been a combative man, railing against his parishioners for what he considered to be their attachment to popish practices. When preaching he had said that 'his parishioners were papists and that they would rather . . . heare masse . . . than to heare the worde of god trulie preached'. Another witness said that Daynes called those who wished to hear service said according to the book of Common Prayer 'papists atheists and caterpyllers and worse'.²³ After Daynes's dismissal from the living of Flixton his patron seems to have kept in touch with him. In his will, made in November 1603, John Tasburgh IV left three pounds to be distributed amongst the poor of Bungay thought to have most need by the churchwardens and 'by the good discretion of Maister Daynes preacher of the word of God there'.²⁴

In view of John Tasburgh IV's clear religious leanings and his connections with other Puritan gentry families such as the Gills, Traces and Ashfields, it comes as a surprise that his only son was permitted to marry a Roman Catholic recusant, Lettice Cressy. There seems little doubt that she had been brought up a Roman Catholic, and one can only suppose that Thomas Tasburgh, her step-father, suggested and promoted the match. Regrettably both marriage and spouse are poorly documented. The precise date of her marriage to Sir John Tasburgh is unknown, although an entry in one of his father's account books suggests that it may have taken place in 1593-4.²⁵ If this was indeed so, the couple were very young and may not have lived together at first. According to evidence she gave in the Norwich Consistory Court in 1635, Lettice Tasburgh was born at Holt in Hampshire in 1580.²⁶ There is no village of this name in Hampshire, but her de la Warr relations lived in that county and the connection was maintained by the marriage of her eldest son with Anne, daughter of Sir Richard Tichborne, the head of a well known recusant family of Tichborne in that county. Lettice's father, James Cressy, had as a young man been in the service of Lord de la Warr and had fallen in love with one of his master's daughters, Jane West. Lord de la Warr refused to countenance their marriage, and James Cressy went abroad and became a Roman Catholic. When he returned to England he married Jane, by now a widow, and converted her to his new faith (Hamilton, 1904, 253). It is interesting that in 1592-3 Christopher Cressy, formerly of Twyford in Berkshire, was fined £300 for recusancy (Calthrop, 1916, 6). The same recusant roll lists the estates of John Tasburgh IV's half-brother, Thomas, among those which had been seized and were being farmed by the Crown. Lettice's marriage must have taken place by 20 May 1597, when John Tasburgh IV conveyed his landed estate in Flixton, Bungay, South Elmham St Peter and St Margaret to his son and his heirs. Lettice was given a jointure of 200 marks a year.²⁷

In 1565 John Tasburgh IV appointed Thomas Bateman as his attorney with full power to lease land, receive rents, evict tenants and so forth. The former agreed not to sell any land or to revoke this agreement, which was to last for his lifetime, and entered into a bond of £5,000 to keep the agreement.²⁸ This seems a strange arrangement, but a curious case in the Court of Star Chamber in 1589 suggests that John Tasburgh IV may not always have been in his right mind. It seems that in 1589 Thomas Bateman, who was both brother-in-law and son-in-law to this John Tasburgh, and his wife wanted an enquiry into whether 'they with whom the said John Tasborough dwelt' 'weere indiferent and meet men to have the gov[er]nment of the said John Tasburgh his landes and children'.²⁹ Without further evidence, the precise implications of this case must remain obscure. It is noticeable, however, that this John Tasburgh seems not to have played the part in public life taken by both his father and his son, although the certificates of musters for Suffolk in 1573 and 1577 show him as one of the captains.³⁰ Two surviving account books from the 1590s show that someone other than John Tasburgh IV was keeping his accounts.

Whatever his mental state, John Tasburgh IV's affairs prospered. In 1588 he was able to give his daughter, Maud, a dowry of £1,000 when she married Robert Ashfield. His accounts for 1593-4 show an income of £519 and a surplus at the end of the year of more than £124.³¹ As the accounts show a sum of £1,859 in hand at the beginning of the year, the Tasburghs must have had other sources of income in addition to their estate in Flixton and neighbouring parishes. In the 17th century at least three quarters of the Suffolk gentry were small parochial squires with an average income of less than £300 (Everitt, 1969, 13). Clearly the Tasburghs belonged to that quarter of the Suffolk gentry that could be described as rich.

John's half-brother, Thomas, seems to have been something of an adventurer. Rather oddly there is no mention of Thomas in his father's will, but his elder half-brother paid him an annuity of £20 and the brothers appear to have been on good terms. Some time between May 1572 and May 1577 Thomas married Dorothy, widow of Sir Thomas Pakington and a daughter of Sir Thomas Kitson of Hengrave. The Pakingtons, like the Kitsons, were a recusant family. She must have been much older than Thomas since her eldest son was born in 1549; she died on 2 May 1577. Subsequently he married, as the third of her four husbands, Jane, daughter of William West, Lord de la Warr, and widow of James Cressy and thus mother of Sir John Tasburgh's wife, Lettice (Suckling, 1846, 198). It seems likely that both she and Thomas were recusants. In 1595 Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, possibly a crypto-catholic himself and certainly with strong Catholic connections, was trying to pull strings to secure the dropping of a recusancy charge against the wife of his 'cousin' John Tasburgh.³² In the 16th century the word cousin was used very loosely, and there seems to be no connection between the Sackvilles and the Flixton Tasburghs. On the other hand, Thomas Tasburgh, whose son was named John, was connected with Lord Buckhurst through his first wife who was an aunt of Buckhurst's second wife. A letter dating from between 1591 and 1594 refers to John Tichbourne, 'a seminary' and son of old Mrs Tichbourne of Winchester, lodging at Mr Tasburgh's near Brickhill beyond St Albans. This must refer to Thomas rather than to his half-brother, John Tasburgh.³³ In 1596-7 Thomas Tasburgh, at that date a justice of the peace for Buckinghamshire, was examined because he had threatened to bring an action against a neighbour who had called him and his wife maintainers of popery and had declared that he and his wife were married by a priest. Thomas denied the charges and stated that the marriage was solemnized by the minister of Twyford in Buckinghamshire in the presence of his stepson, Sir John Pakington, and others. He also said that not many witnesses were present as the marriage 'was objected to'.³⁴ In April 1608 Nicholas Tempest wrote a letter to a lady living at Flixton, probably Lettice Tasburgh or her mother, the widow of Thomas Tasburgh. It is likely that the recipient was a recusant, since it is mainly concerned with the

affairs of the arch-priests George Blackwell and George Birket.³⁵ The letter also mentions a Mr Cressy, probably the Robert Cressy whose name appears on a recovery of 1607, by which Sir John Tasburgh broke an entail; he may well have been a brother of Lettice.

Thomas was admitted to Gray's Inn in 1573, which suggests that he was a small child when his father died in 1552. He appears to have settled in Buckinghamshire and is usually described in documents as being of Hawridge in that county. He sat in parliament as one of the two members for the borough of Aylesbury in 1584, 1586 and 1597, and as a county member for Buckinghamshire in 1588. He was a teller of the Exchequer and was knighted at Dublin by the Earl of Essex on 9 May 1599. Being a youngest son and at the least an occasional recusant seems to have been no hindrance to a successful career in his case.

Sir Thomas Tasburgh died suddenly on 17 January 1603, and his widow subsequently lived partly at Flixton with her daughter, Lettice, and partly in a house in the Norwich suburb of Bracondale. A long and interesting inventory of the goods of 'Lady Jane Tasburghe' at 'Bracondale house by Norwich' was made in 1613; its total value was £378 16s. 10d.³⁶ This does not seem to be a probate inventory, as two letters written by Sir John Tasburgh to Lord de le Warr in 1617 refer to 'my Mother', and this can only have been his mother-in-law.³⁷

John Tasburgh IV had only one son. Although his name does not appear in the admission registers of any of the four Inns of Court, it seems probable that he attended one of them after coming down from Oxford. There are various references in his father's account book for 1597-8 to the payment of debts he had incurred in London.³⁸ In November 1597 John Trace paid a twelve pounds tailor's bill for his nephew 'Mr John Tasburghe the yonger'. This bill was by then nearly a year old, and shows that the young man had expensive tastes in dress.³⁹ It is not clear when he married, but on 20 May 1597 his father arranged for an annuity of £120 to be paid to his son and daughter-in-law for their 'livelihood and maintenance'. The money was to be paid half-yearly at 'the place where the Font stone in the Temple Church London is now situate'.⁴⁰ This sounds as though the son was still pursuing his legal studies in London or frequently visited the City. Another document, bearing the same date, conveyed to young John Tasburgh and his heirs his father's lands in South Elmham, Ilketshall and Bungay.⁴¹ If the son had no heirs, the estate was to pass to Thomas Tasburgh of Twyford, Buckinghamshire, who would then have to pay £1,000 each to the elder John's three daughters. This arrangement was made nearly two years before the birth of John and Lettice Tasburgh's first child and eleven years before their eldest son was born. John Tasburgh was knighted by James I at the Charterhouse in May 1603, on the same day as Richard Tichborne, whose daughter was to marry Sir John's eldest son. John Tasburgh was appointed a justice of the peace for Suffolk on 3 March 1602.⁴²

With Sir John Tasburgh the family's social and economic rise reached its peak, but in his marriage with Lettice Cressy lay the seeds of its decline. An undated and damaged letter from Sir John is clearly concerned with the recusancy of his wife and daughter. He denies that he has been angry with the latter for not going to church and with 'hir mother for soe perswading hir'. He goes on to say that he has only used 'gentle and kynde perswasions begotten of a sinceare trewe affection'.⁴³ According to the Louvain Chronicle Sir John's eldest daughter became a nun, and this letter may refer to her. A document amongst the Adair papers in the Suffolk Record Office at Ipswich seems to have been drawn up by someone anxious to find the best way to secure from seizure the property of a recusant, and to ensure its safe possession by his children.⁴⁴ This may have been written by Sir John or by one of his descendants.

Sir John made larger purchases of land than any other member of his family. Shortly after his father's death in 1607, he bought nearly 500 acres of land, five messuages and a

'capital mansion house' from his cousin, Thomas Bateman.⁴⁵ Far more important was his acquisition of the manor of South Elmham from the Norths in 1617-18. Sir John paid £3,490 for the estate, the annual value of which he reckoned to be £240 15s. 2d; the largest part of this was the rent of £145 paid for the 290 acres of demesne.⁴⁶ This purchase made Sir John the largest landowner in South Elmham, and the lord of the paramount manor as well as of the only two others of any significance.

In 1617, like many of his contemporaries, he invested money in the Virginia Company.⁴⁷ In return for a payment of £200, Lord de la Warr, Governor of Virginia and a cousin of Sir John's wife, agreed to make over to Sir John 700 acres of land in the colony and to provide thirteen men to cultivate it. Three letters of Sir John's, concerned with his investment in de la Warr's voyage to Virginia in 1618, have survived.⁴⁸ Two of them are addressed to Lord de la Warr and show that Sir John was endeavouring, without much success, to recruit men for the voyage. He wrote: 'I have also endeavoured my best to furnish you with men out of these p[ar]tes; but ye reputation of Virginia is not yet growne able to counter vayne ye doubt & danger of soe longe a voyage.' Sir John expected to receive a third of the annual profits from the cultivation of his land in Virginia, but it is doubtful if he ever received any return on his investment; the Virginia Company failed in 1623.

It is not clear whether Flixton Hall was built by Sir John Tasburgh or his father, and in the absence of building accounts it seems unlikely that the date of its erection will ever be known. The South Elmham court rolls mention Sir John's 'newe parke' in 1611,⁴⁹ so it was probably built before then. There is a tradition that the house was designed by Inigo Jones, but judging from the engraving, showing the north and principal front of the house in 1844 and printed by Suckling (1846, *opp.* 200), it bore no resemblance to that architect's classical style. Stylistically it seems much closer to Elizabethan mansions such as Longleat and Burghley House. The Tasburgh household accounts, which exist for a number of years between 1594 and 1618, indicate that small amounts of building work were being carried out quite frequently, but there is nothing to suggest the building of a large house. For instance, in November and December 1616 quite large quantities of sawn boards and nails were bought, but no indication is given of the purpose for which they were required.⁵⁰ It is not even certain, as has been indicated, when the Tasburghs left St Peter's Hall, or for how long, if at all, they lived at Flixton Abbey. There are a number of references in the account books and other documents to the Abbey, and these make it clear that at least part of the former conventual buildings were in use as a residence. An indenture, dated 24 May 1575, between John Tasburgh IV and Thomas Bateman, refers to the former's 'mancion howse at Flixton', and a note on the back reads 'for my chamber at ye Abbey'.⁵¹ The conveyance of 20 May 1597 referred to above mentions a 'capitall messuage in Flixton aforesaid wherein Edward Tasburgh gent now dwelleth', and another capital messuage in the parish of St Peter, called 'Peeters howse' and occupied by John Plough, who at that date paid more rent than any of the other Tasburgh tenants.⁵² The latter house is clearly St Peter's Hall, but the former could either be Flixton Abbey or Boyse Hall. Edward Tasburgh was certainly living at Boyse Hall at one time as is shown by an undated document headed: 'A note of what is lefte at Boyse Haule with Mr Edward Tasburgh.'⁵³ This document is an inventory of windows, doors, hinges and so forth, and shows that Boyse Hall was a comparatively small house of only three cells; it must have been no more than a farmhouse, but it stood within a very large moat which still exists. There is no certainty that Flixton Hall was an entirely new building; like so many houses of that period it may have been an enlargement and rebuilding of an existing house, possibly the capital mansion house bought from the Batemans in 1607. The Batemans certainly owned a house called New Hall and George Bateman, who died in 1581, described himself in his will as of Flixton. A document, dated 2 July 1631 and entailing

property on the heirs of Charles Tasburgh and his wife, refers to a 'capital messuage called Newhall alias Flixton Hall.'⁵⁴

As well as building in South Elmham, the Tasburghs continued to keep a house in Norwich. In 1619 Sir John took a 40-year lease of a house, with stables and a ten acre pasture close, in Bracondale. This house was described as 'newe built', and was let at a rent of £25 a year. An inventory, dated October 1618, of the window glass in a house in Bracondale may refer to the house in which Lady Jane Tasburgh had lived, as one of the rooms is called 'my old Ladies chamber'. Probably the lease of this house had expired.

Sir John's household accounts show that he lived in some style. He kept a coach, and his servants included a coachman, a kitchen boy, a footboy and a cook. A letter of 1622 from Sir John to Framlingham Gawdy shows that the former's cook, Lucas, was in trouble as the putative father of a bastard child. Sir John asks that Lucas's journey to Harling to be examined may be delayed 'in regarde of some daylie expectation I live in to see some freindes here when a Cooke can worst be spared.'⁵⁵

It seems probable that Sir John was in poor health for some months before his death on 24 April 1629, as he was settling his affairs the previous October. He had made his will two years earlier, but on 20 October 1628 he set up a trust fund, to pay his debts and legacies, by leasing to his executors the manors of Boyse and Flixton and 'the mannor or Messuage called Newhall in Flixton wherin the said Sir John Tasburgh nowe dwelleth'.⁵⁶ The lease was to end as soon as all his debts and legacies were paid, and would be void if his wife predeceased him. A few days after these documents were drawn up, Sir John and Lady Tasburgh founded an almshouse in Homersfield, which was to be supported after the death of the founders by whoever owned Flixton Hall. The only record of this charitable foundation is in the South Elmham court book.⁵⁷ A letter, dated 4 March 1629, from John Sackville to Endymion Porter speaks of Sir John Tasburgh lying sick and 'cannot escape'. It goes on to suggest that Porter should try to obtain the heir's wardship: 'true he has a mother, but she is a Papist'.⁵⁸ The accounts of Sir John's executors show that £100 was laid out on 'blackes & morneing sutes' after his death, and that a stone cutter was paid six pounds for work on his gravestone.⁵⁹ In his will he had asked that his body might be buried 'without any funerall pompe . . . but rather in a very private fashion'.⁶⁰

In fact Sir John's eldest son, Charles, was within six weeks of his twenty-first birthday at the time of his father's death, so his wardship would have been very brief. Charles and his next brother, Cressy, were educated at Mr Dormond's school at Eye and at Christ's College, Cambridge, which both boys entered on 25 May 1626; they remained there until June 1628 (Venn, 1922, iv, 200).

While at Cambridge, Charles and Cressy had as their tutor Dr Joseph Mead, an arminian, whose private account book is preserved in the archives of Christ's College.⁶¹ Sir John Tasburgh paid Mead £20 every quarter for his son's expenses, and the tutor kept a careful account of his disbursements, which usually exceeded £20. The purchase of a number of books is recorded: most of these were works of history, logic and geography, and included Speed's maps, but there were also a few devotional works such as Featley's *Handmaid to Private Devotion*. Featley, like the authors of the other religious books, was a Protestant and wrote anti-Roman Catholic works, such as *Transubstantiation Exploded*. Both his choice of tutor and the books bought for his sons suggest that Sir John was trying to counteract the religious influence of their mother. Shortly after their arrival in Cambridge, viols were purchased for both boys and a musician was paid 13s. 4d. a month for music lessons. They also had a French master, paid 14s. a month, during their second year at Christ's. The accounts are mainly concerned with payments for clothes, coals, repairs to boots and shoes, and, on their first arrival in Cambridge, with the purchase of furniture for their rooms and the

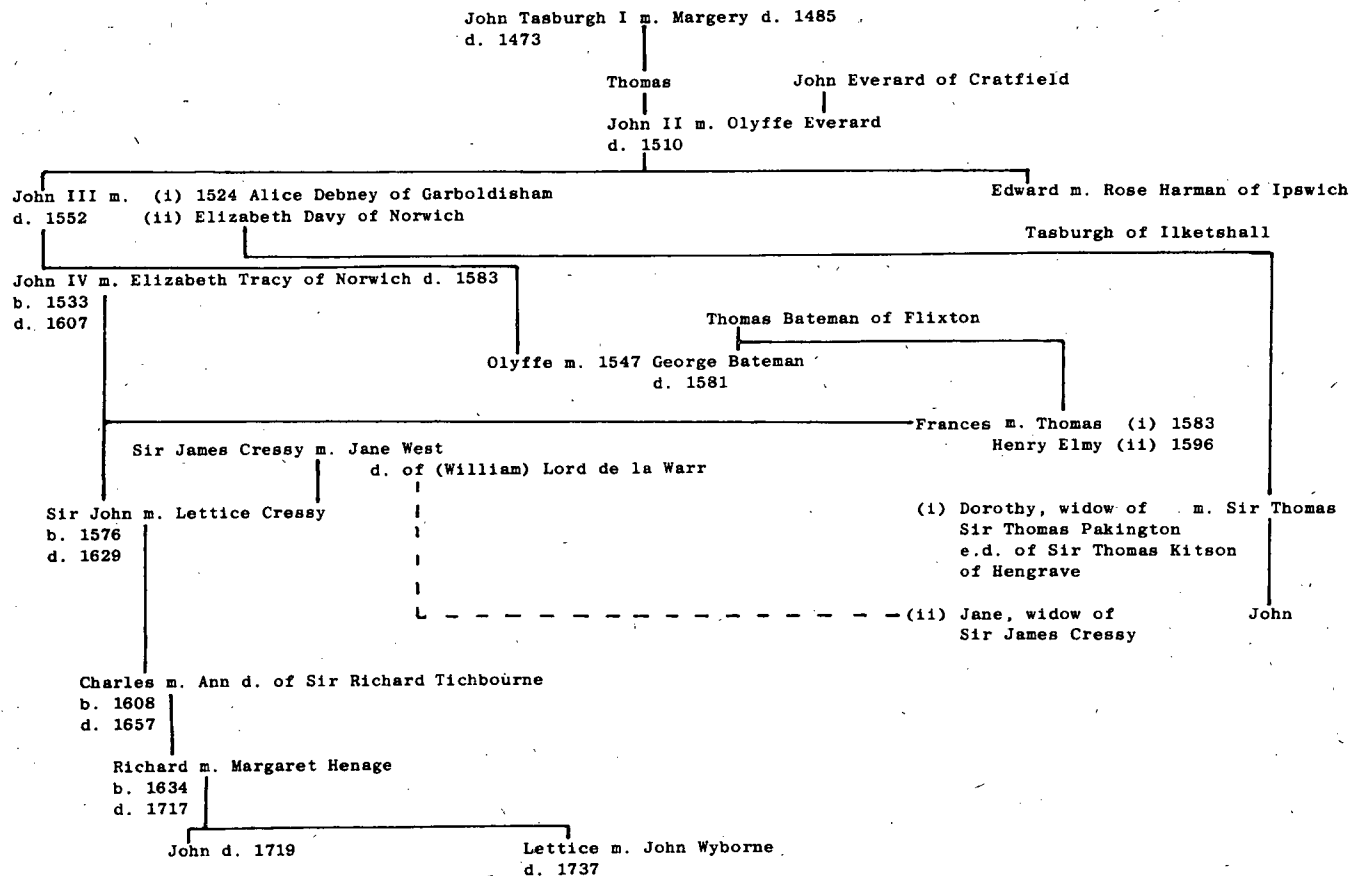
making of gowns. Tuition cost twenty-five shillings a quarter for each boy, the bedmaker was paid three shillings and the barber sixpence a month. In the summer of 1626 each boy had ten shillings to spend at Sturbridge fair, and in January 1627 they both had five shillings spending money when they went to a horse race; this may have been Cottenham races. The accounts also record several journeys: one to Audley End to stay with the Earl of Suffolk, another to Bury, and a visit at Dalham to Sir Martin Stuteville, who had accompanied Drake on his last voyage to the New World. On this last occasion Charles and Cressy were chaperoned by an older man, a bachelor of arts, perhaps to protect them from the temptations of Newmarket through which they would have had to pass. Mead's accounts give a rare glimpse into the life of an early 17th-century undergraduate, and show the Tasburgh brothers to have been cultivated young men with grand social connections.

In November 1628 the brothers were admitted to Gray's Inn (Venn, 1922, IV, 200). Payments made by the executors of their father's will show that they were still there in the autumn of 1629. According to the Louvain Chronicle, Sir John Tasburgh was 'a hot Protestant' and insisted that his children be brought up in his faith, but his efforts were clearly not successful (Hamilton, 1904, 253).⁶² The admissions register for Douai College shows that two of Sir John's younger sons, Peregrine and John, were admitted in 1631 and 1632 at the ages of seventeen and fifteen. The register also shows that in December 1650 their eldest brother, Charles, swore his profession of faith (Burton and Williams, 1911, I, 291, 304, II, 507). In 1645 we find John Tasburgh living in France as a professed royalist. He later returned to England and during the 18th century Bodney Hall in Norfolk was the seat of his descendants (Pollen, 1909, 18, 355, 427).

Charles Tasburgh married Anne, eldest daughter of Sir Richard Tichborne some time before 2 July 1631, on which date a document was drawn up entailing property on his heirs. The later Tasburghs are not very well documented, and this may be partly a result of their recusancy. In the spring of 1641 the widowed Lady Tasburgh and her family had been living in the parish of St Andrew Holborn for nearly a year, and a 'certificate for the subsidy' which she then paid describes her as 'a recusant'.⁶³ In 1643 two thirds of the estates of Charles Tasburgh and his mother were sequestered. Eight years later in 1651 Charles Tasburgh's affairs came before the Committee for Compounding with Delinquents when he asked for an order for the repair of the manor houses of Flixton, Boyse and Elmham and of Homersfield bridge; all were stated to be 'much decayed' for want of repairs. Nearly three years elapsed before the order was granted. Meanwhile in 1652 Charles told the Committee that the County Committee had certified that, due to the neglect of the tenants, repairs to his farms would cost £200 and to his mansion house £300. He was granted permission to fell timber for repairs and to cut wood for burning bricks. In 1653 he mortgaged some of his property in order to pay his debts and raise portions for his younger children (Green, 1892, 2708-10). Finally in 1656 Charles Tasburgh became tenant of his own sequestered property, paying a rent of £600; when he died in 1657 at the age of 49 he owed £270 in rent.⁶⁴ A schedule of his debts drawn up on 23 May 1655 shows that he owed £1,140 to eleven creditors, mostly living in East Anglia, although two were Hampshire men.

Richard Tasburgh, like his father, seems to have had financial difficulties: in 1688 he mortgaged the manor of Flixton late Priory for £1,000.⁶⁵ At the time of the Popish Plot, Richard and his wife, Margaret, were imprisoned and tried for their supposed complicity. Margaret's monument in Flixton church refers to this, and to their acquittal by 'a Jury of worthy Gentlemen out of Suffolk'. This was not the only occasion on which the Tasburghs' religion caused them to be suspected of disloyalty. In 1695-6 several Norfolk gentry, amongst whom was Mr Tasburgh, were suspected of Jacobite plotting and of holding meetings at the Goat Tavern in Norwich, which was kept by a Quaker. Richard's son, John, appeared on a

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list of Roman Catholics, non-jurors and others who refused to take the oaths to George I 'after the unnatural rebellion in the North 1715' (*V.C.H.*, Norfolk, 1906, 301). Although Richard had seven children, they all died unmarried or childless except the younger daughter, Lettice, who married John Wybarne. They inherited the Tasburgh estates, but in the next generation the Wybarnes too died out in the male line, and the estates were sold, eventually coming into the hands of the Adair family.

The last male Tasburgh of the direct line died in 1736, thus ending the family's connection with South Elmham which had lasted for nearly 300 years. The decline of the family set in rapidly after its apparent success during the lifetime of Sir John Tasburgh. There is no evidence that the family over-reached itself financially by extravagance in building or by giving large dowries to daughters. Far more likely an explanation is that it was the strain of recusancy which entered with Sir John's marriage to Lettice Cressy that led to the Tasburghs' economic and social decline. A family that might have been expected to have played a prominent part in local politics in the exciting middle years of the 17th century did not in fact do so. Charles Tasburgh avoided involvement in the royalist cause; his estates were sequestered solely because of his recusancy and not for political reasons. After 1629 their recusancy barred the Tasburghs both from the justices' bench and from the society of many of their equals, and led to their partial impoverishment. Had it not been for Sir John's marriage with Lettice Cressy his descendants might have continued the steady upward progress of the Tasburgh family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Dr D. N. J. MacCulloch for drawing my attention to the *Louvain Chronicle* and for other suggestions and references.

NOTES

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| 1 N.R.O. Dean and Chapter records, Master of the Cellar rolls, 1436-7, 1437-8, 1438-9. I am indebted to Dr R. Virgoe for this reference. | 26 N.R.O. DEP 42. |
| 2 S.R.O. HA 12/B2/6/2. | 27 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 71. |
| 3 S.R.O. HA 12/B2/6/1. | 28 S.R.O. HA 12/B2/19/25 and 26. |
| 4 S.R.O. HA 12/B2/18/13. | 29 P.R.O. STAC 5 B.6/2. |
| 5 N.R.O. N.C.C. Gelour 27. | 30 B.L. Harl. 309, ff. 169, 210. |
| 6 N.R.O. N.C.C. Hubert 72. | 31 S.R.O. HA 12/E1/12/77. |
| 7 B.L. Stowe Charter 373. | 32 Calendar of Hatfield MSS, H.M.C., v, 198. |
| 8 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 85. | 33 Calendar of S.P. DOM. Eliz., 1591-4, 495. |
| 9 P.R.O. P.C.C. Horne 15. | 34 Calendar of S.P. DOM. Eliz., 1595-7, 16. |
| 10 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 97. | 35 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 193. |
| 11 S.R.O. HA 12/E1/12/61. | 36 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 17. |
| 12 S.P. DOM. Henry VIII SP1 155/740. | 37 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 37. |
| 13 Hengrave, Deposit 18, p.6. | 38 S.R.O. HA 12/B1/2/107. |
| 14 S.R.O. HA 12/E1/4/50. | 39 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 13/28. |
| 15 S.R.O. HA 12/B1/4/76. | 40 S.R.O. HA 12/B2/12/26. |
| 16 S.R.O. HA 12/B2/7/5. | 41 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 71. |
| 17 S.R.O. HA 12/B2/18/35. | 42 P.R.O. C231/1, f. 130r. |
| 18 P.R.O. P.C.C. Pynnyng 16. | 43 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 76. |
| 19 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 13/28. | 44 S.R.O. HA 12/B1/3/28. |
| 20 Cambridge Univ. Archives, Will Register II, 78. | 45 S.R.O. HA 12/B1/2/101. |
| 21 P.R.O. P.C.C. Stafforde 3. | 46 S.R.O. HA 12/B1/2/98. |
| 22 S.R.O. HA 12/A1/2. | 47 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 75. |
| 23 N.R.O. DEP 24, pp. 9-14. | 48 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 37. |
| 24 P.R.O. P.C.C. Huddlestone 66. | 49 S.R.O. HA 12/C2/41 Court held 4 Oct. 1611. |
| 25 S.R.O. HA 12/E1/12/77. | 50 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 116. |
| | 51 S.R.O. HA 12/B1/19/19. |
| | 52 S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 71. |

- ⁵³ S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 173.
⁵⁴ S.R.O. HA 12/B2/7/24.
⁵⁵ B.L. Egerton 2715, f. 232.
⁵⁶ S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 94 and 96.
⁵⁷ S.R.O. HA 12/C2/42 Court held 28 Oct. 1628.
⁵⁸ S.P. DOM. Chas. I, 3, p. 487.
⁵⁹ S.R.O. HA 12/B1/1/5.
⁶⁰ P.R.O. P.C.C. Scroope 17.
- ⁶¹ I should like to thank the Master and Fellows of Christ's College for allowing me to see Joseph Mead's account book.
⁶² The Chronicle is perhaps not an entirely reliable source.
⁶³ S.R.O. HA 12 unlisted 147.
⁶⁴ S.R.O. HA 12/B1/4/71.
⁶⁵ S.R.O. HA 12/B2/6/39.

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Abbreviations for MSS

- B.L. Egerton British Library, Egerton MSS.
 B.L. Harl. British Library, Harleian MSS.
 HA 12 Adair MSS in S.R.O.
 Hengrave MSS from Hengrave Hall *penes* the Trustees of Sir John Wood's estate, at present in the Cambridge University Library.
 N.R.O. Norfolk Record Office.
 P.C.C. Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills, now P.R.O., PROB. 11.
 P.R.O. Public Record Office.
 S.P. DOM. State Papers Domestic.
 S.R.O. Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich branch.