

THE HERVEYS: THREE GENERATIONS OF TUDOR COURTIER

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IN RECENT YEARS the court as a centre of English political life has received increasing attention from historians of the 16th century.¹ It may soon be possible to arrive at a more exact understanding of how the court functioned both as a centre of patronage and as a theatre of exchange between the concerns of the county communities and those initiatives of the government which inevitably impinged upon such local concerns. The Privy Chamber, that section of the royal household closest to the monarch's person, has had the pride of place in these studies. It is perhaps natural that most of this research has been based on the reigns of particular monarchs, taken in isolation from one another. It is, however, possible to view the court from another perspective, as a forum where it would be possible for a family, once a member had established himself there, to maintain a presence over several generations.² One of the most successful of these families in the 16th and early 17th centuries was the Herveys of Ickworth,³ who are the subject of this study.

The court, broadly speaking, functioned on two levels. Its 'below-stairs' section – the *domus regis providenciae* as the author of the Black Book of the Household of Edward IV appropriately named it – dealt with the provisioning and running of the household. The 'above-stairs' part, the *domus regis magnificenciae*, was devoted to the service of the monarch in his personal or political capacity and existed for the setting of a suitably sumptuous stage on which the rôle of the sovereign in the body politic would be outwardly and visibly enacted as a political sacrament.⁴ By the late 16th century this upper part of the court resembled a series of concentric circles. The innermost circle comprised the Privy Chamber with its hierarchy of gentlemen, gentlemen ushers, grooms, ladies, gentlewomen and chamberers, whose numbers and proportions fluctuated during the reigns of Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth. The Bedchamber itself did not acquire a separate institutional existence until the reign of James I, who created for it a complete staff, duplicating the Privy Chamber offices which, far from being abolished, swelled to record size.

Beyond the Privy Chamber was the Presence Chamber with its treasurer, cupbearer, sewers (gentlemen responsible for arranging the dishes on the table), esquires of the body, gentlemen ushers daily waiters, gentlemen ushers quarterly waiters, sewers of the chamber, grooms of the chamber (headed by the groom porter), and the corps of gentlemen pensioners founded by Henry VIII in 1539. With the naturally restricted access for men to the Privy Chamber during the reign of Elizabeth, some of the offices in the outer chamber underwent an inflation of numbers.

Next came the guard chamber with its yeomen of the guard, and beyond this the below-stairs household. Here, in the *domus providenciae*, were a fair number of families whose sons served there for several generations. This was natural, considering the somewhat undemanding nature of much of the work there as well as the ease of employing deputies or assistants, and the webs of intermarriage and kinship which bound together many of the household servants (Braddock 1971, 124–47). Above-stairs the number of the families who served regularly for several generations was much smaller. A very small number of families like the Manners, the Carews, the Knyvetts, the Norrises and the Herveys appear to have had one or more sons (and sometimes daughters) serving in the presence chamber throughout much of the 16th century. During Elizabeth's long reign a few more families such as the Careys and the Knollyses managed to obtain several such positions at court for a number of their sons and daughters. The Herveys are particularly interesting both for the length of time they retained their foothold at court and because of the number of their sons who served there.

The Herveys came originally from Thurleigh in Bedfordshire, where another, bastard, branch of the family remained until the male line failed early in the 18th century. In the 15th century a younger son of this family, Thomas, married the only child of Henry Drury and in so doing acquired the estate

at Ickworth, Suffolk, which Thomas's eldest son William (d. 1538) inherited. Of William's three sons, John, Nicholas and Edmund, John as the eldest inherited Ickworth, where he lived until his death in 1556 (Howard 1864-71 II, 134-80; Vivian 1895, 453). It was the spectacularly successful career of the second son, Nicholas, which established the family at court.

Nicholas was introduced to court by his cousin, Sir George Hervey of Thurleigh, a soldier, early in the reign of Henry VIII.⁵ By 1520, when Sir George died, Nicholas stood high in the king's favour. At the time of his early death in 1532 he had long been established as a gentleman of the king's Privy Chamber, while in 1530-31 as ambassador to the Emperor Charles V, Sir Nicholas, as he had then become, had shown himself to be a strong supporter of his master's efforts to free himself from Catherine of Aragon.⁶

Edmund Hervey, Sir Nicholas's younger brother, spent most of his life at court. By 1516 he was one of the gentlemen of the queen's household. He was appointed a gentleman pensioner at Christmas 1539 when that elite military corps of well-born gentlemen was first organized, and held this position until late 1553 or early 1554, about which time he is thought to have died.⁷

Another member of the family to gain a post at court in the early 1540s was Anthony, son of a younger son of that Thomas Hervey who had acquired Ickworth. He may have been the soldier of that name who was at Tournai in 1515. By 1519 he was serving as a gentleman in the Courtenay household, and from the middle of the next decade he was one of the more important servants of the Marquess of Exeter, whose downfall in 1538 he survived, apparently without difficulty. In subsequent years he received from the Crown various offices such as keeperships of parks and stewardships of manors, many of which he had formerly exercised under the Marquess. He dwelt in Devon, first at Haywood and afterwards at Columbjohn, and by 1543 was serving as a justice of the peace on the Devon bench.⁸

In March 1545 Anthony Hervey was one of the gentlemen garrisoning Boulogne, which Henry VIII had recently conquered. To keep the town the king had caused a band of gentlemen-at-arms to be organized. These were soon to become, if they were not intended as such from the beginning, a subsidiary group to the recently-founded gentlemen pensioners.⁹ With the surrender of Boulogne to the French in 1550 the newer corps lost its original *raison d'être*, and provision was then made, ineffectually in the short term, for the gentlemen-at-arms to be phased out by promotion to gentlemen pensioners as places became available in that group.¹⁰ In the period between late 1553 and summer 1554 when Edmund Hervey left the gentlemen pensioners Anthony Hervey became one. During Mary's reign he resumed his association with the Courtenays, at least to the extent of being involved in various property transactions with Gertrude, Dowager Marchioness of Exeter, widow of his former master. He left the pensioners in the course of 1559, although he did not die until 1564. His removal from the commission of the peace for Devon in 1561, taken together with his departure from court, may indicate a man of conservative religious views, although the marriage of his only child, his daughter Margaret, to that zealous Protestant Amias Paulet may belie this supposition.¹¹

One Hervey who was certainly a Catholic was Thomas, eldest son of that Sir Nicholas who was such a staunch supporter of Henry VIII. Thomas became a gentleman pensioner in 1547 at the beginning of Edward VI's reign (P.R.O., LC2/2, ff. 41-43). Under Mary he was an associate of the Earl of Devon and Viscount Montagu, and to the Viscount (son of Sir Anthony Browne, the first captain of the gentlemen pensioners) he acted as muster master during the St Quentin campaign in 1557 (Bindoff 1982, II, 311-12). His promotion to the post of knight marshal of the household in March 1558 (C.P.R. (P. & M.) IV, 75) was to be of short duration, for he lost all his offices on Elizabeth's accession. Soon afterward he went abroad and entered the service of Philip II, who employed him as an agent in the Low Countries from 1560 to 1577. He also served the Duke and Duchess of Feria and Don Juan of Austria. With the spread of the revolt against Spanish rule in the Netherlands in the mid 1570s his position became precarious. The States General had him arrested in 1577 and as no more is heard of him thereafter he may have perished in prison.

Mary's reign was in fact a rewarding time for the family, for between 1554 and 1558 two more of its members, Henry and Francis, became gentlemen pensioners. Henry was the eldest of the three sons of Sir Nicholas Hervey by his second marriage, and was thus Thomas Hervey's half-brother (Howard 1864-81, II, 156). Unlike the half-brother, Henry and his two elder brothers (both of whom were named George) showed no Catholic sympathies. He settled at Frearne, near Chessington in Surrey. By 1566 he had acquired an additional minor office at court, that of sergeant of the buckhounds, which in the 1580s he assigned to his eventual successor, one James Bond.¹² Around 1580 he became a justice of the peace of the quorum in Surrey. Only fragmentary episodes from his life are recorded. At the time immediately preceding the outbreak of the rebellion of the earls in November 1569 he was one of the men dispatched with Edward Fitzgerald, the lieutenant of the gentlemen pensioners, to escort the Duke of Norfolk to Windsor, and in 1576 he was involved in the apprehension of a priest.¹³ He died towards the end of 1589.¹⁴ Of his younger brothers, the next, George, was constable of Maryborough castle in Ireland until his death sometime after 1604, while the last, Sir George, died as lieutenant of the Tower on 10 August 1605 (Howard 1864-81, II, 156, 158, 172).

Francis Hervey's appointment to the corps took place between 1 July and 14 December 1558, at the very end of Mary's reign, and he remained a gentleman pensioner until his death in 1602.¹⁵ He was the second son of John Hervey of Ickworth, Sir Nicholas Hervey's elder brother and head of the family. Although Francis, who inherited Cressing Temple, near Witham in Essex, which he held in right of his first wife, was a justice of the peace there from 1569 and sat as a burgess in five Elizabethan Houses of Commons, he was by no means a permanent courtier.¹⁶ Together with another gentleman pensioner, Brian Annesley, he petitioned unsuccessfully in 1592 for a grant of the farm of fines upon actions of trespass and outlawries in courts of record (H.M.C. *Hatfield House*, IV, 257). Throughout the 1590s he was closely associated with the Earl of Essex. At his house in Middelburg in the Netherlands, where he was frequently to be found in the years 1594 to 1597, Hervey received the Earl's secret foreign correspondence, which he passed on to another of the Earl's men, Henry Wickham, for delivery to their master. Or so it seemed. Wickham (*alias* William Sterrell) was actually using the network for his own ends, or rather as a secure channel of communication between recusant circles in England and their fellow Catholic exiles abroad. Among the letters addressed to the Earl which Hervey forwarded were some marked with a token which Wickham, noticing, removed and conveyed to their true intended destination. Ralph Winwood laid hands on a great number of these old letters in France in 1602 and sent them to Cecil. Winwood said nothing tending to implicate Hervey, who had probably just recently died, and there is no evidence to prove his involvement. There is some indication, though, that a number of the obscure figures involved in these dubious transactions used Hervey's house in Middelburg as a meeting place.¹⁷

Except for the Middelburg interlude, Hervey divided his time between Cressing Temple and the court until his death, and was not called in question at the time of Essex's rebellion. His will was made on 11 February 1602 and proved on 22 June the same year. He provided generously for his widow, his second wife, and bequeathed £2,000 'which I have in good golde lying in my closet in Cressing Temple ready to be paid' to his only child, Elizabeth, who, however, died shortly after her father.¹⁸

William Hervey, who completes this series of Hervey courtiers, surpassed the rest. The only son of Henry Hervey, he joined his father in the ranks of the gentlemen pensioners between Michaelmas 1586 and Lady Day 1587.¹⁹ After serving with distinction against the Armada in 1588, he was involved in various seafaring activities of a privateering sort throughout the early 1590s.²⁰ He took part in the expedition to Cadiz in 1596, where the Earl of Essex knighted him on 28 June (P.R.O., SP.12/259/83). The following year, on Essex's expedition to the Azores which sought and failed to intercept the Spanish treasure fleet, he served as captain of the *Bonaventure* (Purchas 1625, IV, 1939). Early in 1598 he was made keeper of St Andrew's castle in Hampshire at £20 per annum, and later in the same year Tobie Matthew reported that Hervey and Sir Henry Palmer were in competition for the comptrollership of the navy (P.R.O., C.66/1481 m.37; SP12/286/56). It was possibly the news of

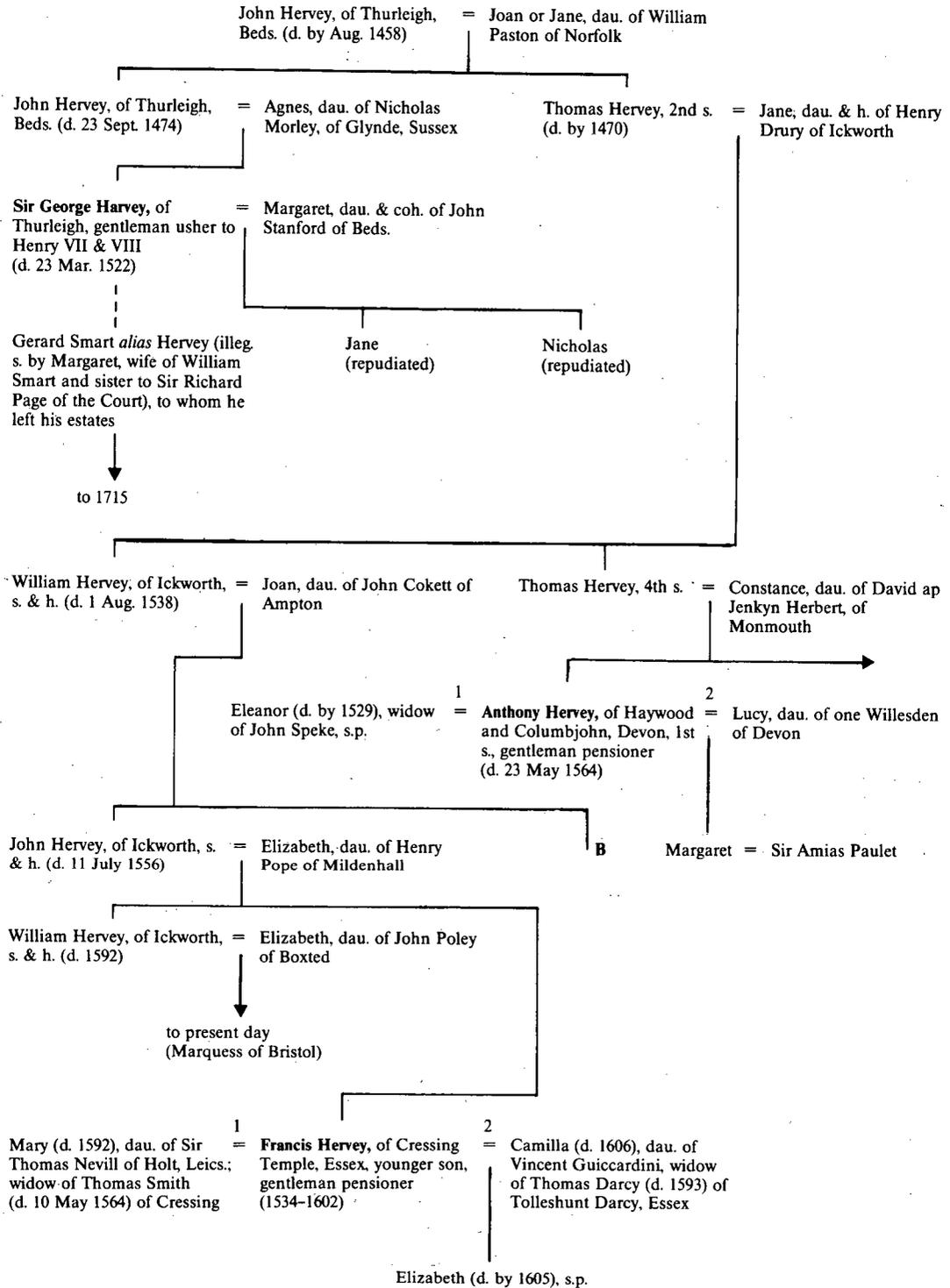
Hervey's impending marriage to the Dowager Countess of Southampton (which appears to have annoyed the Queen) which ruined his chance of the post. The marriage certainly offended the Earl of Southampton (who was himself then in confinement because of his secret marriage to Elizabeth Vernon, one of the maids of honour), whom Essex fully supported, telling Hervey that if he went on with the marriage he could expect enmity from Southampton and no further friendship from himself. Hervey's only reply was that 'they that were angry without cause must be pleased without amends'. Thus he lost Essex's friendship, and although the Queen was reconciled to the marriage by late 1599, Hervey's career remained at a standstill for the rest of the reign.²¹

Shortly after James I's accession he was granted the office of remembrancer of the first fruits and tenths in the Exchequer, and at the same time was promoted to be standard-bearer of the gentlemen pensioners. During these years he spent time in Ireland and became something of an expert on Irish affairs and government. After the death of the Countess of Southampton in 1607 he married Cordelia, one of the three daughters of Brian Annesley, a fellow gentleman pensioner. The marriage brought him the house at Kidbrooke, Kent, where, when not in Westminster, he generally dwelt for the rest of his life. The couple had a number of children, of whom only a daughter survived, to bring his lands back to the parent stem by marrying John Hervey of Ickworth. (His only son to survive childhood was slain in Germany in 1632 when, coming back from a grand tour that had taken him as far afield as Asia, he decided to join the Swedish army). Sir William left the gentlemen pensioners in 1616, but retained his Exchequer office, executed as it was by a deputy, until his death. He was made a baronet in 1619, a baron in the Irish peerage in 1620 and, finally, in 1628 Lord Hervey of Kidbrooke in the English peerage.²² He died in 1642 and was buried in Westminster Abbey on 8 July. In his will, made on 16 December 1637 but not proved until 1 November 1648, he stated that he had no debts and apart from a few bequests to servants he left everything to such of his daughters as should survive him (P.R.O., PROB. 11/206, f. 161, P.C.C. 172 Essex).

Lord Hervey had much earlier suffered, unwittingly and doubtless unwillingly, a previous 'death' for which the evidence rather surprisingly survives. Late in 1589 he sailed as leader of a privateering voyage which came to grief in the Azores in May or June 1590, when he was taken prisoner. At the end of that year he procured his removal to Lisbon, where he was held to ransom. His release was being negotiated in November 1591, and by the end of the year he was back in England (P.R.O., SP.12/238/131; 12/239/87; 12/240/77). On 25 September 1589, before his departure from England, he had made a will in order to provide for the division of the profits of the voyage and the satisfaction of his few debts should he not return. The cost of the preparations for this 'adventure' (as the will called it) came to £5,018, of which all but £814 was Hervey's own, and thus it was he who in all likelihood was the director of the voyage. He must have been reported dead before word of his captivity reached England, since the will was proved in April 1590. The date of probate on the will itself is 17 April 1590, while the register book of wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury records it as occurring ten days later and notes that he died in parts beyond the seas (P.R.O., PROB.11/75, f. 191 (P.C.C. 25 Drury); PROB.8/8, n.f.).

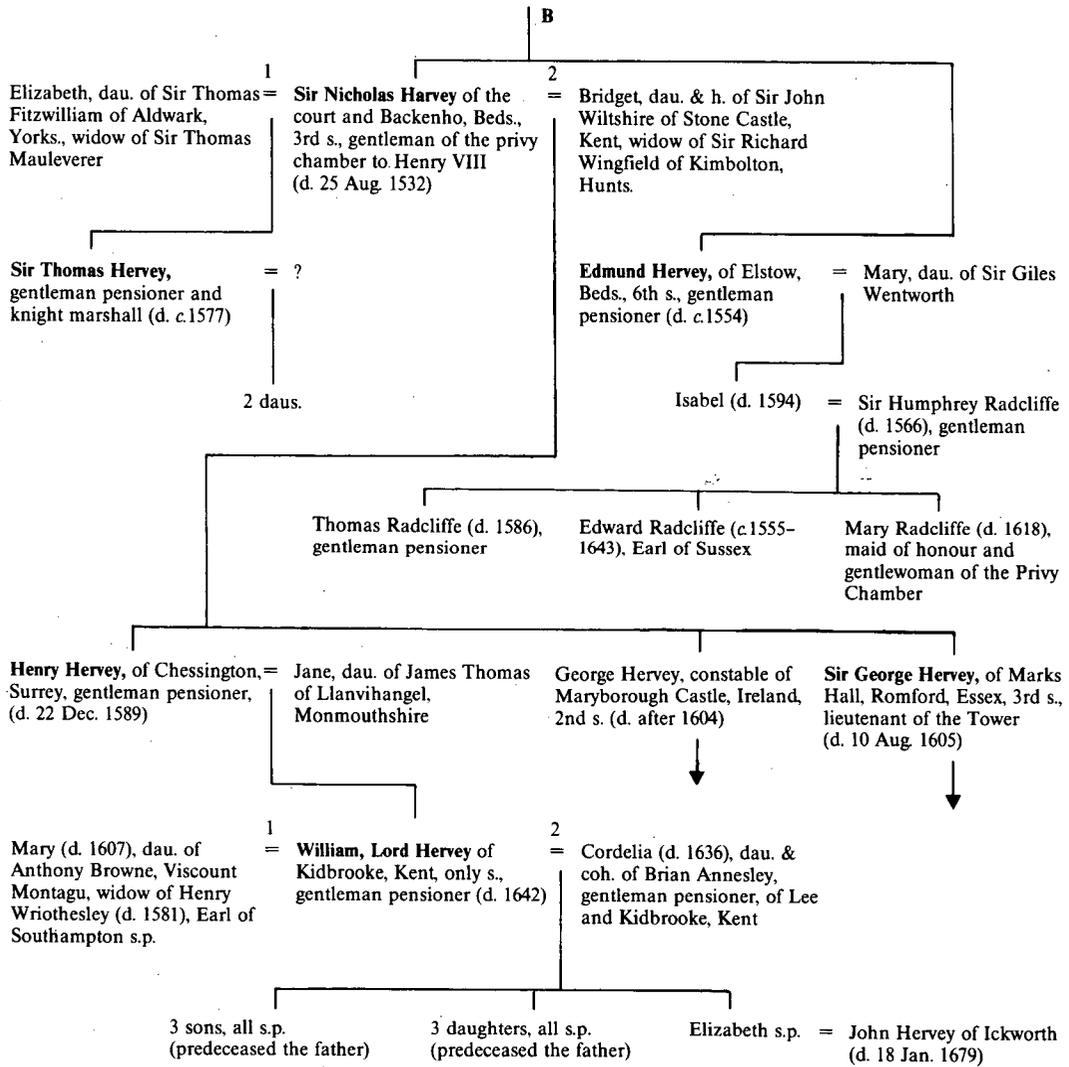
Meanwhile Henry Hervey, William's father, had died, probably on 22 December 1589. He had made his will on 17 September 1589 and had named William as one of the executors. On 15 October he added a codicil providing for the executorship of the will if his son was dead. The will was proved on 6 April 1590. No inquisition post mortem was taken on Henry until 31 January 1592. This, if it did mistake the date of his death, at least recorded correctly that the heir was his son William, aged twenty-four years and more at his father's death and now living in Southwark (P.R.O., PROB.11/75, f. 178 (P.C.C. 23 Drury); C.142/232/50). In the meantime, however, on 28 May 1590, an inquisition post mortem had been taken on William Hervey (P.R.O., C.142/227/201). This curious document declares that the younger Hervey died on 3 March 1590 at Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, and went on to state that Hervey's father had died in the same town on 25 November 1589. There is no room for doubting the identity of the William Hervey who was the subject of the inquisition; since it correctly lists his

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Elizabeth (d. by 1605), s.p.

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Names in bold type are those of courtier Herveys during the period covered by this article. Daughters and younger sons in several generations have had to be omitted.

seven sisters, all known from the father's will, as his coheirs, a fact which makes it all the more difficult to imagine what necessity compelled the jurors to return upon their oaths so palpably false a statement about the place of death. Moreover, there is no internal evidence that the probate grant of Hervey's will was ever revoked, or the inquisition annulled. This is thus an extreme example of the danger of trusting such records without supporting information.²³

Hervey returned to England, of course, after his long imprisonment in Lisbon. One of his first steps on returning was to deal with the inquisition which had been taken in his absence. This was the more necessary in that Hervey's lands were in the Queen's hands by reason of the minority of the youngest of his seven sisters, Bridget Hervey. He petitioned the Court of Wards in Michaelmas term 1591. The marginal reference to his case in the entry book of decrees for that court, 'William Harvye to traverse an office founde after his deathe when he was but a prisoner in Spayne supposed to be deade', witnesses to the success of his suit.²⁴

With so long and so continuous a presence at court as the Herveys enjoyed, one might naturally suppose that successive heads of the Ickworth house would have played a prominent part in the life of Tudor Suffolk. This their landed estate alone would have rendered likely, and with kinsmen at court to watch out for their interests it would have been nearly inevitable. But it is, in fact, their absence from the active governing élite of the county which is their most salient characteristic. None of the family sat on the Suffolk commission of the peace in this period. In this they contrasted remarkably with the Herveys of Thurleigh, who despite their illegitimate origins and lesser estate were normally to be found on the Bedfordshire bench. Why they were so little involved in Suffolk affairs is difficult to say. One's first suspicion in such cases is recusancy or strong religious conservatism, but there is no evidence of it for these Herveys. There remains but speculation. Perhaps the successive heads of the Ickworth house in these years, William (d. 1538), his son John (d. 1556) and John's son William (d. 1592) were unfit in some manner now no longer ascertainable for the tasks required for the governing élite. This does not appear likely. Perhaps, then, it may be that they were simply uninterested in county government and inward-looking. If so, it is a noteworthy contrast to the Herveys who attempted to make their way at court.

NOTES

- 1 The standard account of the structure of the court is still Chambers 1923, i, 27-70. Recent published works include Elton 1976, 211-28 and Williams 1983, 259-86. For the Privy Chamber see Starkey 1973. Various studies of different aspects of the Tudor and early Stuart courts are currently in progress.
- 2 The word 'family' is used here in a loose sense which embraces cadet branches of a lineage as well as the principal stem.
- 3 'Hervey' is the modern conventional spelling. It was used in the 16th and 17th centuries, but 'Harvey' is more frequent. 'Hervey', 'Harvy' and 'Harvie' are not unknown.
- 4 The best edition of the Black Book is Myers 1959. Similar materials from various reigns may be found in the Society of Antiquaries 1790.
- 5 It was a bastard son of this Sir George who in 1520 continued his father's line at Thurleigh.
- 6 Bindoff 1982, ii, 310-11. Hervey's tomb is at Amptill. This may indicate that at the time of his death he was one of the gentlemen whom the King had obtruded upon his Queen, who was then dwelling at that Bedfordshire royal house.
- 7 *L.P.* ii, pt 2, app., 58; xiv, pt 2, 745; *B.L.*, Royal MS. 7.C. xiv, f. 123. This list of gentlemen pensioners dates from between Christmas 1539 and 3 Jan. 1540. Hervey's name is not among those on a list drawn up immediately prior to the foundation of the band (*P.R.O.* SP.1/156, ff. 56-57). It occurs on Queen Mary's coronation list (1 Oct. 1553) but not on one prepared around the time of her marriage in July 1554 (*P.R.O.* E. 101/427/5, f. 29r.; *S.C.L.*, Strafford MS 33 (n.f.)). He was certainly dead by the end of Mary's reign when Sir Humphrey Ratcliffe, a fellow gentleman pensioner and the husband of Hervey's only child, had possession of Hervey's lands at Elstow, Beds. No record of his death is known.
- 8 Howard 1864-81, ii, 139-40, 154-55; Vivian 1895, 453; *L.P.* ii, pt 2, 1514; iii, pt 1, 152; iv, pt 1, 1292, p. 794; pt 2, 3759; xiii, pt 1, 1192; pt 2, 755; xviii, pt 1, 226(30).
- 9 *L.P.* xx, pt 1, 444. The gentlemen-at-arms may have been modelled upon a similar but much older group, the 'spears' of Calais, which may also have served as a model for the gentlemen pensioners—if any other model than the contemporary practice of the French court is required.
- 10 *A.P.C.* iii, 1550-1552, p. 30. The surviving lists of gentlemen pensioners show that this command was more often ignored than obeyed during the remaining years of Edward VI's reign.
- 11 *S.C.L.*, Strafford MS 33; *P.R.O.*: E.101/427/6, f. 29r.; C. 142/140/161; C. 142/138/26; *LC.* 2/4(3), p. 96; *SP.* 12/11/32, 33; *B.L.*, Lansdowne MS 1218, ff. 4-43, 59-89.
- 12 *B.L.*, Cotton MS Vespasian C.XIV, pt 1, f. 70r.; Harleian MS 1641, f. 5a; 1642, f. 5b; 1644, f. 30a.
- 13 *B.L.*, Harleian MS 474; *H.M.C.*, *Hatfield House*, i, 531; *A.P.C.*, ix, 1575-1577, 255.

- ¹⁴ Hervey's inquisition post mortem, which was not taken until Jan. 1592, gives the date of his death as 25 Nov. 1589 (P.R.O., C. 142/232/50), but the surviving gentlemen pensioners' roll for that quarter indicates 22 Dec. 1589 as the date (P.R.O., E. 407/2/187). It seems better to trust the latter. His will was made on 17 Sept. 1589 and proved on 6 Apr. 1590 (P.R.O., PROB. 11/75, f. 178; P.C.C. 23 Drury).
- ¹⁵ P.R.O., LC. 2/4(2), f. 28v.; E. 407/1/1-34.
- ¹⁶ Howard 1864-81, ii, 155; Hasler 1981, ii, 266; *C.P.R. Eliz.*, v, 1569-72, 222-26.
- ¹⁷ *H.M.C., Hatfield House*, v, 62-63; vi, 60; P.R.O., SP. 12/283/75.
- ¹⁸ P.R.O., PROB. 11/99, ff. 322v.-324r. (P.C.C. 40 Montague); PROB. 11/108, ff. 54r.-56v. (P.C.C. 58 Stafforde).
- ¹⁹ P.R.O., E. 407/1/17-41; E. 407/2/187; PRO. 30/26/186; B.L. Add. MS 34122B.
- ²⁰ G.E.C., *Complete Peerage*, vi, 516; *H.M.C., Hatfield House*, iv, 203, 381-82. The experience of captivity which we shall speak of did not chasten him, for he resumed his activities as a freebooter shortly after his return to England.
- ²¹ *H.M.C., Hatfield House*, viii, 371-73; ix, 312; xiv, 79-81.
- ²² P.R.O., SP. 40/1, f. 81v.; Hasler 1981, ii, 267; G.E.C., *Complete Peerage*, vi, 516.
- ²³ I have found at least one other inquisition post mortem which is just as erroneous as that of William Hervey. This is the inquisition of Humphrey Coningsby of Neen Sollars, Shropshire (P.R.O., C. 142/326/52). Coningsby, born in 1566, was, according to the elaborate inscription on his monument in Neen Sollars church, a great traveller. Between 1594 and 1610 he went on three voyages, which together took him through most of central and eastern Europe, Spain and even to Greece, Cyprus, Anatolia and Constantinople, where (still according to his epitaph) the sultan and his mother honoured him with great gifts. Finally, the 4th tyme he toke his jorney from London to Venice the 10th day of October 1610, and from that day was never after scene by any of his acquaintance on this side the seas or beyond, nor any certainty knowne of his death, wher, when, or how'. The monument was erected in 1624. Coningsby's inquisition was taken on 18 Jan. 1613. It declares that he died at his manor of Cuttesden, Worcs., on 1 Feb. 1611.
- ²⁴ P.R.O., WARDS 9/86, f. 156. There was, alas, no such happy return for Humphrey Coningsby.

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Primary sources: abbreviations

- A.P.C.* *Acts of the Privy Council of England.*
- C.P.R. (Eliz.)* *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Elizabeth I.*
- C.P.R. (P. & M.)* *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Philip and Mary.*
- H.M.C.* *Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts.*
- L.P.* *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* (ed. Brewer, Gairdner and Brodie, 1862-1932, London).

Abbreviations for MSS

- B.L. British Library.
- P.C.C. Prerogative Court of Canterbury.
- P.R.O. Public Record Office.
- S.C.L. Sheffield Central Library.