

Lady Eleanor Talbot's Other Husband: Sir Thomas Butler, heir of Sudeley, and his family

JOHN-ASHDOWN HILL

Although King Henry VII tried very hard to suppress the fact, it is well known that in asserting his claim to the throne in 1483, Richard III had cited a prior contract of marriage between his brother, the late king Edward IV, and the Lady Eleanor Talbot. A marriage contract which, together with Edward's clandestine second marriage with Elizabeth Woodville, made all the children of that second marriage illegitimate. It is now also established that Lady Eleanor Talbot was, at the time of her alleged marriage with Edward IV, a young widow, having been previously married to Sir Thomas Butler. Indeed, the *Titulus Regius* of 1484 refers to both Lady Eleanor and Elizabeth Woodville under their married names, as 'Eleanor Butler' and 'Elizabeth Grey' respectively. In this article, however, to avoid confusion, the consistent practice is to refer to women by their maiden surnames, hence 'Eleanor Talbot' and 'Elizabeth Woodville'. Previous writers have casually suggested that Richard III selected Lady Eleanor Talbot to be named as 'the lady of the precontract' because there were no members of her family around to contradict him. This article establishes that on the contrary there were numerous relatives of both Lady Eleanor and Sir Thomas Butler living in the Richard's reign and that these living relatives apparently had no difficulty in accepting Richard III and in prospering under him.¹

Sir Thomas Butler is a shadowy figure and only three facts seem to be generally known about him: that he was the only son and heir of Ralph Butler, Lord Sudeley, that in about 1450 he married Lady Eleanor Talbot, daughter of the first earl of Shrewbury, and that about ten years later he died, leaving no children. The details of his father's career are well established and are not explored extensively here. Sir Thomas' father, Lord Sudeley, was an important man whose name is occasionally accompanied by that of one of his stepsons, but his son and heir seems scarcely to be mentioned. Only after Sir Thomas' death does his name occur in connection with the death of his widow, Eleanor, and the ensuing confiscation by Edward IV of the manors which Thomas had once held.²

I have speculated on a previous occasion³ that the Sir Thomas Butler who is known to have been killed on the Lancastrian side at the battle of Towton might possibly have been Lord Sudeley's son and Eleanor Talbot's husband, but this cannot be the case. It is clear from Lady Eleanor's inquisition *post mortem*⁴ that Sir Thomas Butler had died, and his widow had inherited his two manors, during the reign of Henry VI, since, while impugning Henry's right to the throne, the inquisition specifically dates Eleanor's inheritance of the manors to year thirty-nine of his reign. Anyone writing at the time of Eleanor's inquisition *post mortem* in 1468 who wanted to refer to a death at the battle of Towton would certainly have dated the event to the first year of the reign of Edward IV rather than to the thirty-ninth year of Henry VI, so we can be certain that Sir Thomas must have died before Edward IV was proclaimed king on 4 March 1461.

Sir Thomas Butler's family, the Butlers of Sudeley, had risen from the ranks of the gentry as a result of the marriage of his great grandfather, William le Botiler of Wem, Shropshire, with Joan, the heiress of the de Sudeley family. This marriage had elevated the Butlers to the minor aristocracy. As a result, Sir Thomas' grandfather and namesake, Thomas Butler, had inherited the title of Lord Sudeley. He had died in 1398, but his wife, Alice Beauchamp, lived on until 1443, so Sir Thomas Butler will have known his grandmother and probably also her second husband, Sir John Dalyngrigg.⁵ Alice Beauchamp gave her first husband three sons, who held the Sudeley title in succession, and of whom Ralph was the youngest.

¹ I have previously indicated how Eleanor's sister, Elizabeth, Duchess of Norfolk, seemed to be on good terms with Richard III, though not, apparently, with Henry VII. See J. Ashdown-Hill, 'Norfolk Requiem', *Ricardian* vol. 12, no. 152, pp. 208, 210, 212.

² *CPR 1467-77*, p. 133.

³ J. Ashdown-Hill, 'Edward IV's Uncrowned Queen', *Ricardian*, vol. 11, no. 139, December 1997, p. 188, n. 28.

⁴ J. Ashdown-Hill, 'The Inquisition Post Mortem of Eleanor Talbot, Lady Butler', *Ricardian* vol. 12, no. 159, December 2002, pp. 563-573.

⁵ Both Ralph Butler, his stepson, and Sir John Montgomery, his younger step-daughter's husband, were among those who inherited manors previously held by Sir John Dalyngrigg. *CCR 1441-47*, p. 95, 12 March 1443.

The eldest son, John, died childless and unmarried in 1410. William, the second son, then held the Sudeley title for seven years, but he also died childless. His widow, Alice, however, was a lady of some importance (although nothing is known of her family) because in 1424 she was appointed the governess of King Henry VI, with leave to chastise him when necessary. A right which she must have used sparingly, for Henry VI seems to have been fond of her and periodically made her gifts when he was grown up.⁶ In addition to his two elder brothers, Ralph Butler also had at least two sisters, and they and their children, who were Sir Thomas Butler's cousins, will be mentioned later.

The name of Sir Thomas Butler's mother can also be ascertained, as can details of his maternal family connections. Ralph Butler, Lord Sudeley, was married twice. His second marriage was to Alice Lovel, *née* Deincourt,⁷ and took place on 8 January 1463, when Thomas was already dead. Thomas' mother was Ralph's first wife. Her name has been given by most earlier writers as Elizabeth Hende⁸ but, like Alice Lovel, Elizabeth had also had a previous husband, and Hende was not her maiden name, but rather the surname which she had acquired by that previous marriage, her first husband having been John Hende II (as numbered on the Hende pedigree given here), a draper of the company of Drapers of London from 1367,⁹ and at various times sheriff, alderman and mayor.¹⁰ Elizabeth's maiden name was Norbury, which is a toponym. Her family had for several generations held the manor of Norbury in Cheshire, and under their earlier surname of Bulkeley, had been domiciled in that county for even longer. Two sons were born of Elizabeth Norbury's marriage with John Hende II: John Hende III ("the elder"), and John Hende IV ("the younger"). The name of the latter sometimes figures together with that of his stepfather, Lord Sudeley. John Hende III and IV were the half-brothers of Sir Thomas Butler.

Sir Thomas' mother was the daughter of the wealthy Sir John Norbury I of Norbury, Cheshire, Treasurer of England. The career of Sir John Norbury I is well documented, although the fact that he was Sir Thomas Butler's grandfather has not previously been recognised. He is first encountered as an esquire in the service of the house of Lancaster, being specifically attached to John of Gaunt's son, Henry (the future Henry IV). John Norbury accompanied Henry into exile in France when he was banished by his cousin, King Richard II, and returned with him to England in 1399, when, shortly before his abdication, Richard II was forced to appoint Norbury as treasurer of England, a post which he then held for the entire reign of Henry IV, and which brought him into close contact with the rich businessmen in the city of London whose loans, together with loans from Sir John Norbury himself, were to finance Henry IV's government. Prominent among these businessmen was John Hende II, a very wealthy widower to whom, in about 1408, Sir John Norbury was able to marry his young daughter, Elizabeth.¹¹

Elizabeth Norbury had at least one sister and two half-brothers. Her father married twice. His first wife, the mother, if chronology is any guide, of both Elizabeth and her sister, Joan, was called Petronilla, but her maiden surname I have not discovered. Petronilla was still living in August 1401, when she is named with her husband as the recipient of Henry IV's grant of the manor of Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, but by 1412 Sir John was married to Lord Sudeley's sister, Elizabeth Butler, and they already had two sons. Probably Petronilla died in about 1404 and Sir John's marriage with the widowed Elizabeth Butler, Lady Say, took place in about 1405.¹² Sir John Norbury's second marriage was into a family which in

⁶ The fact that 'Dame Alice Boteler' was appointed Henry VI's governess in 1424 is well known but no-one seems previously to have thought about who she might have been. There are two obvious contenders: Ralph Butler's mother and his sister-in-law, both of whom were called Alice. Henry's gifts to his former governess are recorded: *CPR 1436-41*, pp. 46, 127, 367, 434, 534. The fact that the former governess is called 'the King's widow' means that Ralph Butler's sister-in-law is almost certainly the right candidate, as his mother had remarried, and figures in November 1440 as 'Alice Dalyngrrege' (*CPR 1441-46*, p. 458). On the other hand Ralph Butler's sister-in-law, Alice, never remarried, as is shown by the fact that in October 1442 she is called 'Alice, late the wife of William Botiller' (*CPR 1441-46*, p. 116).

⁷ Alice Deincourt was the grandmother of Francis, Lord Lovel, by her previous marriage.

⁸ *Complete Peerage*, vol. 12 part 1, London 1953, p. 421.

⁹ C.P. Boyd, *Roll of the Drapers' Company of London*, Croydon 1934, p. 91.

¹⁰ S.L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London 1300-1500*, Chicago 1948, p. 349. John Hende was mayor of London twice: 1391-92, when he and the city council fell foul of Richard II and Hende was dismissed by the king and imprisoned in Windsor Castle, and again in 1404-05. His name occurs in association with Richard Whittington's on several occasions in the patent rolls, for example 20 June 1407 and 29 May 1411. *CPR 1405-08*, p. 335; *CPR 1408-13*, p. 292.

¹¹ For Sir John Norbury's career, see M. Barber, 'John Norbury', *English Historical Review*, vol. 68 (1953), pp.66-76; B. Burke, *The General Armory of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales*, London 1984, p. 736; *CPR 1396-99*, p. 470; *CPR 1399-1401*, p.541; *CPR 1408-13*, pp. 65, 144, 283, 404, 405, 410; *CPR 1413-16*, pp. 161, 162, 419; C.W. Previté-Orton & Z.N. Brooke, eds., *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 8, Cambridge 1964, p. 363, p. 376; E.F. Jacobs, ed., *The Fifteenth Century, 1399-1485*, Oxford 1961, p.1, p.18, p.429; A. Steel, *Richard II*, Cambridge 1962, p.269. For Elizabeth's first marriage see Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, p. 349.

¹² *CPR 1399-1401*, p. 541; *CPR 1408-13*, p. 404.

origin was similar to his own, but which, by the early fifteenth century, had risen to somewhat higher social rank than his. The Butler (Botiler) family originally held land at Wem in Shropshire but, as we have seen, the advantageous marriage of William le Botiler to Joan, heiress of the Sudeley family, had raised him to the lower ranks of the aristocracy. Like the Butlers, the Norbury family began by holding one or two manors. Their family surname had originally been Bulkeley, which was derived from the name of the manor they first held in Cheshire. Various pedigrees for the Norbury family have survived, of varying degrees of accuracy.¹³ It had been Elizabeth Norbury's great grandfather, Roger, who had changed the family surname from Bulkeley to Norbury on inheriting the manor of Norbury. The Bulkeley coat of arms: 'sable, a chevron between three bulls' heads cabossed argent',¹⁴ was borne by Elizabeth's father, but with a fleur de lis sable on the chevron for difference (see below). Sir John Norbury, however, inherited no manors to go with his coat of arms, and was left to make his own way in the world.¹⁵

As we have seen, thanks to her father's business connections, in about 1408, Elizabeth, who was then probably about fifteen years of age, was married to the much older but very wealthy widower, John Hende II, draper and past mayor (1391-92 and 1404-05). John was probably aged about fifty-eight at the time of the marriage, and seems to have had no surviving sons by his previous wife, Katharine Baynarde,¹⁶ whom he had married in about 1380. Elizabeth, however, bore John two sons, one in 1409 and one in 1412. Both were christened 'John' after their father, and they were later known as 'John the elder' and 'John the younger' respectively.

John Hende II died in 1418, leaving £1000 to Elizabeth and £1500 to each of his sons. About a year later, Elizabeth married Ralph Butler, who, on the death of an elder brother, had recently inherited the title of Lord Sudeley, and who was already a connection by marriage, since Elizabeth's father, Sir John Norbury had, in about 1405, married Ralph's sister, Elizabeth Butler (see above). John Norbury and Elizabeth Butler had two young sons, the elder of whom, Henry, was the godson of King Henry IV, after whom he was named.¹⁷ About four years before his daughter's marriage to his brother-in-law, however, John Norbury seems to have died. He was buried in the church of the Grey Friars in London, beside his first wife and the epitaph upon his tomb described him as *Valens armiger, strenuus ac probus vir*.¹⁸ Probably within a year or two of her second marriage, Elizabeth Norbury gave Ralph Butler a son and heir, the future Sir Thomas Butler. Elizabeth's Norbury arms can be clearly seen, impaled by the arms of Butler of Sudeley, on the Sudeley pedigree roll which was made in 1449 to celebrate Sir Thomas Butler's forthcoming marriage to Lady Eleanor Talbot.¹⁹

Although Elizabeth's marriage to Ralph Butler lasted for more than fifty years, Thomas was to be their only surviving child. If other children were born they must have died young, but it seems quite likely that there were none, as Lord Sudeley spent the greater part of the 1430s and 1440s serving in France (where, presumably, he made the acquaintance of John Talbot, future Earl of Shrewsbury, the father of

¹³ See, for example, Library of the Society of Genealogists, unpublished volume, *Cheshire Pedigrees 1613, from Harl. MSS 1535 & 1070 & from C6 in the College of Arms*, f. 337. This genealogy states that Sir John Norbury married **Eleanor** Butler, the sister of Ralph, and that Elizabeth Norbury was their daughter, but this seems to be erroneous. Better pedigrees are published in J. P. Rylands, ed., *The Visitation of Cheshire, 1580*, London 1882, p. 186 and W. B. Bannerman, ed., *The Visitations of Surrey, 1530, 1572, 1623*, London 1899, pp. 220-21. Neither of these pedigrees mentions Petronilla, however. She is only found as Sir John's wife in the patent rolls.

¹⁴ Burke, *General Armory*, p. 736.

¹⁵ M. Barber, 'John Norbury', p.66.

¹⁶ Baynarde was not her maiden name, which is unknown to me. She was the widow of Thomas Baynarde of Suffolk.

¹⁷ The fact that Henry Norbury was Henry IV's godson is mentioned several times in the patent rolls. See, for example, *CPR 1408-13*, p. 404.

¹⁸ Barber, 'John Norbury', above, p. 75. Sir John Norbury was probably in his late fifties at the time of his death, which Barber places in 1414. The last mention of him is on 16 January 1414, *CPR 1413-16*, p.419. W. E. Hampton, 'Sir Thomas Montgomery, K.G.', *Ricardian* vol. 3, no. 51, December 1975, pp. 9-14, suggests that Sir John's wife, Elizabeth Butler, married her three husbands in the following order: Sir John Norbury; Sir William Heron, Lord Say; Sir John Montgomery. It is, however, chronologically impossible that Elizabeth could have married Lord Say (who died in 1404) after Sir John Norbury (who was certainly living at the beginning of 1414). Moreover, when Elizabeth was married to Sir John Montgomery, she is referred to as late the wife of John Norbury but never as late the wife of William Heron / Lord Say. Also her eldest son is several times described as the godson of Henry IV, implying that he was born in that king's reign. I conclude from all this that, as I have shown in my Norbury pedigree, Elizabeth Butler's first husband was Lord Say, to whom she was married as a young girl, following the death of his first wife, the Say heiress. Only after Lord Say's death in 1404 did she then marry Sir John Norbury. Following Norbury's death in about 1414, she married Sir John Montgomery and by that third marriage, produced at least three more cousins for Sir Thomas Butler. She was also to become the godmother of the eldest son of Richard, Duke of York, namely the future King Edward IV.

¹⁹ New York City Library, Spencer MS. 193.

Lady Eleanor Talbot who was to become Sir Thomas Butler's wife). Elizabeth, on the other hand, probably remained in England, overseeing the management of the Sudeley estates and the upbringing of her three sons. Lord Sudeley, when he returned, looked after the interests of his two Hende stepsons and the name of John Hende IV ('the younger') is, as we have seen, not infrequently coupled with that of Lord Sudeley, while conversely, and very curiously, there is not one undoubted mention of the name of Lord Sudeley's only son and heir, Thomas, and where he lived and what he did are both unknown.

At some point, probably in about 1440 (when his father returned to England and was made a knight of the Garter) and almost certainly before 1443, Thomas was knighted, presumably by Henry VI, and in 1449-50, at the age of about twenty-eight, he married Lady Eleanor Talbot, who was then about thirteen years old, and who must therefore have come, for a time, under the care of her mother-in-law, Elizabeth Norbury, Lady Sudeley. There is one reference to a 'Thomas Boteler, knight',²⁰ to whom, (in association with others) certain lands in Buckinghamshire were entrusted on 25 September 1452 and this Thomas may be Lord Sudeley's son. In June 1443 there is a surviving record of a 'grant by Thomas Boteler of Meridene, knight, to Ralph Boteler, Lord of Sudeley, of lands, tenements, rents etc. in Meridene and Alspath' in the county of Warwickshire.²¹ The mention of Lord Sudeley means that this may refer to his son, and although Sir Thomas' presence at Meriden (where the lordship of the manor was held by the Mowbray dukes of Norfolk) is not otherwise recorded, the neighbouring manor of Alspath was certainly held from the 1470s until 1523 by a family called Butler, who may have been distant relatives of Sir Thomas and Lord Sudeley. Leaving aside the Mowbrays' manor house there are two surviving high status dwellings in Meriden which date back to the fifteenth century and either one of which might have housed Sir Thomas at this time: the Moat House and Walsh Hall. Also, by a curious coincidence, Meriden church houses the anonymous tomb of a fifteenth century knight, of which the stone effigy depicts the deceased in armour with his head supported by angels. This tomb dates from circa 1450-60, but it would perhaps be too much to hope that it might be Sir Thomas Butler's last resting place.²² There is the further record that in 1452 a Sir Thomas Butler, together with others, was granted land at Havering-at-Bower in Essex, which he subsequently released in 1457.²³ This reference of March 1457 may be our last glimpse of Sir Thomas Butler. Thomas and Eleanor left no surviving children and it seems likely that their marriage was childless.

Elizabeth Norbury outlived both her eldest and her youngest sons. John Hende 'the elder' died in 1461, and Sir Thomas Butler seems to have died in 1460. Elizabeth herself died in 1462 and her middle son, John Hende 'the younger', died childless in 1464. Only Elizabeth's eldest son left descendants, *via* his daughter, Joan (or Jane). Elizabeth was remembered, however, by her daughter-in-law, for under the terms of the endowment established by Lady Eleanor and her sister, the duchess of Norfolk, at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, matins of the dead and requiem mass were to be offered there for Elizabeth Norbury. In the surviving indentures, however, her name is not given and she is referred to only as the mother of Sir Thomas Butler.

Sir Thomas Butler's Belknap cousins

When Sir Thomas Butler's father, Lord Sudeley, finally died in 1473, leaving no direct heir, the Sudeley estates devolved upon his great nephew and his nephew, Sir John Norbury and William Belknap esquire, who were respectively the grandson and the son of Ralph's two sisters. On 11 February 1477, following the death of Ralph Butler's widow, Alicia, licence was granted to 'John Norbury, knight, son of Henry Norbury, knight, and Elizabeth Butler [*sic*] and William Belknap, esquire, son of Joan Butler' to enter into

²⁰ CFR 1452-61, p. 17.

²¹ *Descriptive Catalogue of Ancient Deeds in the Public Record Office*, (hereinafter *PRO Deeds*) 6 vols., vol. 2, London 1894, p. 308, B 2507. 24 June 21 Henry VI. I have examined this deed and despite the entry in the catalogue, cannot find that Thomas Butler is called a knight therein. His seal unfortunately shows a punning device rather than a coat of arms. It was apparently impressed with a ring, leaving also his finger print in the soft sealing wax on the back. The impression is an elongated hexagonal shape 15mm x 10mm, formed by the shape of the top of the ring. The oval bezel depicts three tall bottles with the letters B-OT-[E?][LA-R distributed around them.

²² Victoria County History, *Warwickshire*, vol. 4, London 1947, p. 149; N. Pevsner and A. Wedgewood, *The Buildings of England: Warwickshire*, London 1966, p. 354.

²³ *PRO Deeds*, vol. 3, London 1900, p. 377, C. 3519, p. 402, C. 3723. Interestingly the stewardship of Havering-at-Bower subsequently passed into the hands of Sir Thomas Butler's cousin, Sir Thomas Montgomery. Hampton, 'Sir Thomas Montgomery, K.G.', cited above, p. 10.

that part of their inheritance previously reserved to Alicia in dower.²⁴ William Belknap was the son and heir of the elder of Ralph Butler's two sisters, Joan Butler. His father was Hamon (or Hamo) Belknap. On 16 February 1429 provision was made in respect of Hamon's son, John Belknap, during his minority, his father having recently died. Care of the boy is committed 'to Ralph Boteler, knight, John Monngomery [*sic*], knight, and Joan, late the wife of Hamon Belknap', and John Belknap is specified to be Hamon's son and heir.²⁵ From this it can be deduced that by February 1429 the younger Butler sister, Elizabeth, was already married to her third husband, Sir John Montgomery, and that the marriage of the elder sister, Joan Butler, to Hamon Belknap must have taken place in about 1408 or 1409, when Joan would have been in her mid twenties. Her age at the time of the Belknap marriage raises the possibility that Hamon Belknap may not have been her first husband, but if Joan was married previously, no details of that marriage have emerged and such a marriage, if it took place, clearly left no descendants.

Joan and Hamon had two sons. John Belknap is named as Hamon's son and heir but another son, William, eventually inherited the Sudeley estates. Nothing more is heard of John, who must have died childless and possibly at an early age. In addition to John and William it seems likely that Sir Thomas Butler had also a third Belknap cousin. When his aunt Alice, the widow of William Butler, was caring for the infant king Henry VI, she had amongst her ladies one Griselda Belknap.²⁶ The surname is unusual and it seems logical to suppose that Griselda must have been Alice's niece, a daughter of Joan Butler and Hamon Belknap, and the sister of John and William. It is not possible to be certain of what became of Griselda Belknap but the fact that Sir Thomas Butler's elder half-brother, John Hende III, married a lady called Gresilda (Griselda) seems to be too much of a coincidence to be ignored. Surely John Hende's wife must have been his stepfather's niece, Griselda Belknap.

Like the Hendes, the Butlers and the Norburys, the Belknaps seem to have been in the Lancastrian orbit even before the advent of Henry IV. Sir Robert Belknap, justice of the common bench, was disgraced by Richard II, and all his possessions confiscated (though provision was made for his wife, Juliana, and their children). It seems likely that Sir Robert Belknap was Hamon's father, though this relationship is nowhere stated explicitly. Sir Robert Belknap's manors seem to have been returned to him by Henry IV.²⁷ A little later, Hamon Belknap, esquire, was established in the county of Kent. He received commissions of array in respect of that county from Henry V in 1418 and 1419²⁸ and a Kentish connection is borne out by the subsequent claim of the Wotton family of Boughton Malherbe, a village to the south east of Maidstone, to have married a Belknap heiress (probably in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century).²⁹ Certainly Elizabethan and later Wottons included the Belknap, Butler and Sudeley arms among their quarterings, although if Sir Robert Wotton's unnamed Belknap bride had really been the Belknap heiress it seems unusual for the Wottons to have merely quartered her arms rather than emblazoning them on an inescutcheon of pretence.³⁰ In any case, Hamon Belknap's holdings seem by no means to have been confined to the county of Kent. His regular feofees were Thomas Chaucer, the poet's son, and John Golafre. In 1424-25 this trio held the manor of Ermyngton in Devon and, together with John Werefelde, the reversion of the manor of Beerton in Buckinghamshire.³¹

Like their Norbury cousins, the Belknaps seem to have been drawn into the orbit of Lord Sudeley. Thus when Hamon died, early in 1429, it was Lord Sudeley, his sister (the child's mother) and their brother-in-law, Sir John Montgomery, who were given responsibility for Hamon's son and heir (see above), and the year before Hamon's death his putative father, Sir Robert Belknap, was associated with Edward Dalyngrigge, who must have been a relation of Sir John Dalyngrigg, the second husband of Alice Beauchamp, the dowager Lady Sudeley (Ralph and Joan Butler's mother). Edward Dalyngrigge may even have been Ralph and Joan's half-brother.³² It was perhaps as a result of the Butler/Sudeley influence on

²⁴ CPR 1476-85, p. 16.

²⁵ CFR 1422-30, p. 258. That Hamon was probably alive on 22 January 1429 emerges from the commission addressed to him on p. 236.

²⁶ B. Wolffe, *Henry VI*, London 1981, p. 37.

²⁷ The career of Sir Robert Belknap can be traced back to at least 25 March 1367, when he paid homage to Archbishop Langham upon the latter's enthronement at Canterbury. A.C. Wood, ed., *Registrum Simonis Langham Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi*, Oxford 1956, p. 116.

²⁸ CPR 1416-22, pp. 199, 212.

²⁹ The Wotton pedigree gives few dates.

³⁰ R. Griffin, ed., *Visitation of Arms of Kent, 1594*, London 1924, p. 41.

³¹ PRO Deeds, vol. 3, p. 320, p. 331.

³² CFR 1422-30, p. 233.

the next generation of Belknaps that in 1465-1466 Sir Thomas Butler's cousin, William Belknap, is found holding manors in Oxfordshire in association with feoffees who include a member of the Stonor family.³³ A commission of array was addressed to William Belknap by Richard III in December 1484, in respect of the county of Sussex.³⁴ William would then have been about sixty-nine years old. Later, in the next century and the reign of Henry VIII, Edward Belknap, esquire, was involved in a dispute regarding the manor of Goldycote and other land in Worcestershire. Edward may have been a son, or more likely a grandson of William Belknap.³⁵

Sir Thomas Butler's Norbury cousins

The relationship between the Butler and Norbury families was, as we have seen, close, and reinforced by two ties of marriage: first the marriage between Sir John Norbury I and Elizabeth Butler, and then the marriage of Elizabeth Norbury to Ralph Butler. Sir John Norbury I's marriage to Elizabeth Butler must have taken place in about 1405. Although it has been asserted³⁶ that Sir John was Elizabeth's first husband this is chronologically impossible.³⁷ Elizabeth Butler must have been married first to Sir William Heron, Lord Say (from whom she derived her courtesy title of Lady Say), and can only have married John Norbury after Lord Say's death in 1404. Sir John Norbury witnessed the king's will in 1408,³⁸ and on 1 June 1412 the manor of Cheshunt was granted by Henry IV to Sir John and his second wife, Elizabeth Butler, to their son (the king's godson) Henry, and to their younger son, John.³⁹ Unfortunately the Norbury family's *penchant* for the name John makes it difficult to disentangle the various references to 'John Norbury, esquire', several of which could relate either to Henry's younger brother, John II, or to Henry's son, John III. Henry himself, however, is unmistakable, particularly since his name is often qualified by the statement that he was Henry IV's godson, or he is found in association with known relatives.

Henry had been knighted by 1434, for on 12 December of that year a commission was addressed to 'Sir Henry Norbury'. The commission related to Surrey and in the same year Henry is described as 'of Stoke d'Abernon' in Surrey, having married the heiress of this manor, Anne Crosier. The tomb of his wife, Anne, with her brass memorial, is still to be seen in Stoke d'Abernon church, where there is also a Norbury chapel, founded by Henry and Anne's son, Sir John Norbury III (whose tomb is also in the church, although the present brass memorial to him is a replacement, set up in 1633, and anachronistically depicts him in armour of the reign of Charles I).⁴⁰ In January 1441 Henry's right to inherit land at Cheshunt was confirmed and it was noted that the reversion of the manor was granted to him by his godfather, King Henry IV, and that the manor was currently in the hands of his mother, Elizabeth Butler, and her then (third) husband, John Montgomery 'chivaler'.⁴¹ On occasions, as in 1455, for instance, Sir Henry is found acting in association with his uncle and half-brother-in-law, Ralph Butler, Lord Sudeley.⁴² Possibly Henry survived his uncle to inherit the Sudeley estates.⁴³ However, the fact that Henry Norbury's wife, Anne Crosier, who died in 1464, is shown on her tomb as a widow suggests that Sir Henry Norbury died in about 1456-1460, at about the same time as the death of his cousin and nephew, Sir Thomas

³³ *PRO Deeds*, vol. 3, p. 332.

³⁴ *CPR 1476-85*, p. 489.

³⁵ *PRO Deeds*, vol. 5, London 1906, p. 524.

³⁶ Hampton, 'Sir Thomas Montgomery', p. 9.

³⁷ See note 18.

³⁸ J. Weever, *Funeral Monuments*, London 1767, p. 12

³⁹ *CPR 1408-13*, p. 404.

⁴⁰ I. Nairn and N. Pevsner (revised B. Cherry), *The Buildings of England: Surrey*, London 1962, 1971, pp. 465, 468-469. The authors suggest that the Norbury chapel was 'perhaps a thank-offering for Bosworth Field', but adduce not a shred of evidence in support of this theory other than the chapel's late fifteenth century architecture! G.W. Watson, 'William Heroun, Knight, Lord Say', *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica*, 5th series, part 9, p. 243, states that Henry Norbury and his wife, Anne Crosier, were buried at the Grey Friars' London, but Anne's brass memorial is certainly at Stoke d'Abernon.

⁴¹ *CPR 1436-41*, p. 510.

⁴² *CPR 1452-61*, p. 232.

⁴³ As we have seen, the entry in the patent rolls for 1477 is confused and refers to 'John Norbury, knight, son of Henry Norbury, knight and Elizabeth Butler', which could mean either that Henry inherited and his name was accidentally exchanged in the records with that of his father, or alternatively that Henry had died before his uncle and that his son, Sir John Norbury III, inherited from Lord Sudeley, the record having misunderstood John's relationship with Elizabeth Butler, who was not his mother but his grandmother.

Butler.

Despite the possibility of confusion between John Norbury II and John Norbury III, Henry's son, John III, could have been a knight by 1477, for in 1478 a Sir John Norbury occurs in association with Sir Thomas Montgomery, and thereafter was appointed the king's vice marshal by Richard III on 8 April 1484, and received various commissions from that king during 1483-85, the last one being dated 2 August 1485, a mere twenty days prior to the battle of Bosworth.⁴⁴ It is certainly interesting to find the Norbury heir, a close relative of Sir Thomas Butler, acting under the patronage of his uncle, Sir Thomas Montgomery (Sir Thomas Butler's cousin, who was a well-known partisan of the house of York) and apparently serving and receiving appointments from Richard III.

Sir Thomas Butler's Montgomery Cousins

Of all Sir Thomas Butlers close relatives, undoubtedly the one who rose to the greatest prominence under the Yorkist kings was his first cousin, Sir Thomas Montgomery. Details of Sir Thomas Montgomery's career have been published previously, so only a brief outline will be given here, together with some corrections. It has been suggested that Thomas' father, Sir John Montgomery, the third husband of Elizabeth Butler, was a Scot, but this assertion is groundless.⁴⁵ Sir John's ancestors had held land in various parts of England, but John, the father of Sir Thomas, seems to have been the first of his line to make his home in Essex, settling at Faulkbourne, near Witham. Sir John served with distinction in the French wars, and received various titles and honours in the conquered lands, though these were lost later. He must have married Elizabeth Butler, Lady Say, widow of Sir John Norbury, in 1415, and their first child, a son, Thomas, was born in the following year. Subsequently the couple had another son, John, and a daughter, Alice, all of whom were first cousins of Sir Thomas Butler. Like his brother-in-law, Lord Sudeley, Sir John Montgomery returned to England, presumably after the baptism of the duke of York's son, Edward, at Rouen in 1442, for on that occasion his wife, Elizabeth Butler, who was with her husband in France, stood as godmother to the future king. In 1445 and again in 1446 Sir John Montgomery was proposed for election as a knight of the Garter, although on neither occasion was he actually elected, and the Montgomery family had to wait until 1477 to attain this particular honour in the person of Thomas.⁴⁶ Sir John Montgomery died in 1449, and his widow, the much-married Elizabeth Butler, Lady Say, in 1465.⁴⁷

As an esquire Sir Thomas Montgomery is associated with John Hende the younger. Both men were marshalls of the king's hall and wardens of the mint in the Tower of London.⁴⁸ John Hende was a connection of Thomas Montgomery as the stepson of his uncle, Lord Sudeley, and the stepgrandson of his mother, Lady Say. During the reign of Henry VI Thomas was called upon to escort Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, from Leeds Castle in Kent, where she had been tried for sorcery, to London. Thomas' brother, John, was executed by Edward IV in February 1462, for plotting with Margaret of Anjou, the de Veres and Sir William Tyrell against the new king, but this did not blight Thomas' career. He enjoyed Edward's favour, having fought for him against the Lancastrians at the battle of Towton, as a reward for which Edward had dubbed him knight bachelor. His loyalty to the house of York was so well-known that he was immediately imprisoned by the earl of Warwick during the restoration of Henry VI, but he was released in time to meet the returning Edward IV and to help persuade him to drop his

⁴⁴ *CPR 1476-85*, pp. 16, 85, 214, 392, 394, 400, 489, 574.

⁴⁵ Hampton, 'Sir Thomas Montgomery', p. 9. See also B. G. de Montgomery, *The Origin and History of the Montgomerys*, London and Edinburgh 1948, pp.91-98. It is unfortunately necessary to say at once that Hampton's account of Sir Thomas Montgomery contains a number of dubious conclusions. He puts his date of birth much too late, ascribing it to *circa* 1433, whereas in fact Sir Thomas seems to have been born in 1416. As a result of miscalculating the date of birth, Hampton then finds himself obliged to ascribe some of Thomas Montgomery's recorded actions to an uncle whom he calls 'Thomas the elder' to account for early mention of Thomas in the patent rolls. There is no evidence for the existence of such an uncle, except that our Thomas is referred to in the patent rolls on at least one occasion as 'Thomas Montgomery the younger'. Hampton also assumes that Sir Thomas was Sir John Montgomery's younger son, and that his brother, John was the elder, though he cites no evidence for this assumption.

⁴⁶ J. Anstis, ed., *The Register of the Most Noble Order of the Garter*, 2 volumes, London 1724, vol. 1, pp. 127, 130, 199.

⁴⁷ Hampton, 'Sir Thomas Montgomery', p. 9. Hampton gives 1464 for the date of Lady Say's death. This is possible, but see *CPR 1461-67*, p. 459: 'licence to John Norbury esquire to enter into possession of John the elder or Lady Say his wife, 21 June 1465'.

⁴⁸ *CPR 1452-61*, pp. 87, 481.

pretence of returning only to reclaim his duchy of York. As well as serving as the king's counsellor and virtually ruling Essex (receiving many of the manors of the exiled de Veres), Sir Thomas Montgomery enjoyed a distinguished diplomatic career. In 1474 he was sent to treat with the emperor for an alliance and subsequently he met also with ambassadors of the king of Hungary. He was much employed in negotiations with the duke of Burgundy, and had been one of those who had escorted the wedding party of Margaret of York to Flanders in 1468. On this journey, if not before, he must have been much in the company of Elizabeth Talbot, Duchess of Norfolk, Margaret's principal lady-in-waiting, and he must also have known Lady Eleanor Talbot. Both she and her sister Elizabeth were apparently close friends of Sir Thomas Montgomery's sister-in-law, Anne, who, after the execution of her husband (his brother, John Montgomery) lived under Sir Thomas' protection at Faulkbourne. Later, together with Lord Hastings and Lord Howard, Sir Thomas Montgomery negotiated the treaty of Picquigny. It was Sir Thomas who was responsible, in the wake of this treaty, for returning the ex-queen, Margaret of Anjou, to France. Richard III clearly trusted Sir Thomas, who is described in August 1484 as a 'knight of the body'. In April of the same year Richard III had granted 'for life to the king's counsellor, Thomas Montgomery, knight, the castle, lordship and manor of Hyngham', and eleven other Essex manors, including Earls Colne, Hatfield Broadoak, Ongar and Harlow.⁴⁹ It is not known whether Sir Thomas took any part in the battle of Bosworth, but he survived Richard III's fall well enough to be called upon to hold the pall over Henry VII during the latter's coronation. Thereafter, however, he fades from the scene of public life. Many of his manors, together with the castle of Hedingham, were returned by the new king to their former owners, the de Veres. He was, in any case, now growing old. He died in January 1495, probably a little short of his seventy-ninth birthday, and he was buried in the new Lady Chapel which he had built at the abbey of St Mary Grace on Tower Hill, possibly to commemorate his brother who had been executed nearby. His two wives, Philippa Helion and Lora Berkeley were buried with him, or at least, commemorated on his tomb. Philippa had originally been buried at Faulkbourne, but her body may have been brought to London to lie beside her husband's remains. Certainly she no longer lies in the church at Faulkbourne. Sir Thomas' tomb, like the abbey which contained it, is long gone, but his image, together with representations of his mother, Lady Say, and his sister-in-law, Anne, friend of the Talbot sisters, can still be seen in the stained glass donor portraits in the north aisle of Long Melford church, Suffolk. Sir Thomas Montgomery left no living descendants.⁵⁰

Conclusions

Disappointingly Sir Thomas Butler remains essentially a mystery. Even the public acts of his life are hard to pin down and his private *persona* is totally inaccessible. Nevertheless the context in which he lived has become clearer and a network of family connections has been revealed. This network was clearly of importance to the individuals who comprised it. Butlers, Hendes, Belknaps, Norburys and Montgomerys intermarried, worked side by side, helped each other to get on at court and in the world and took care of each other's fatherless children. Somewhere Sir Thomas Butler fits into this family network. It is also apparent that the traditional view of his family as avidly and unrepentantly Lancastrian represents too crude an assessment. The generation of Ralph Butler, Sir John Norbury and Sir John Montgomery certainly gave loyal service to the Lancastrian kings, but their sons seem to have found no difficulty in serving the house of York and some of them, notably Sir Thomas Montgomery, seem to have embraced the new dynasty with enthusiasm. It is also worthy of note that practically everyone named in this account must have been personally acquainted with Lady Eleanor Talbot, Sir Thomas Butler's wife. The fact that none of them uttered a word of protest, apparently, when Richard III named her as Edward IV's wife in his *Titulus Regius* may be thought no more than politic on their part, the notorious aspect of the relationship of Edward IV and Lady Eleanor being one of the corner stones of Richard's canon-law claim. But that not one of them came, or was brought forward after 1485 to explode the myth argues strongly that there was no myth to explode.

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⁴⁹ *CPR 1476-85*, pp. 542, 430.

⁵⁰ Hampton suggests that he may have had a daughter, but his inheritance devolved upon the posterity of his sister, Alice. His will is published in H. Nicholas, *Testamenta Vetusta*, vol. 2, London 1826, p. 396.

Fig. 1. BUTLER OF SUDELEY

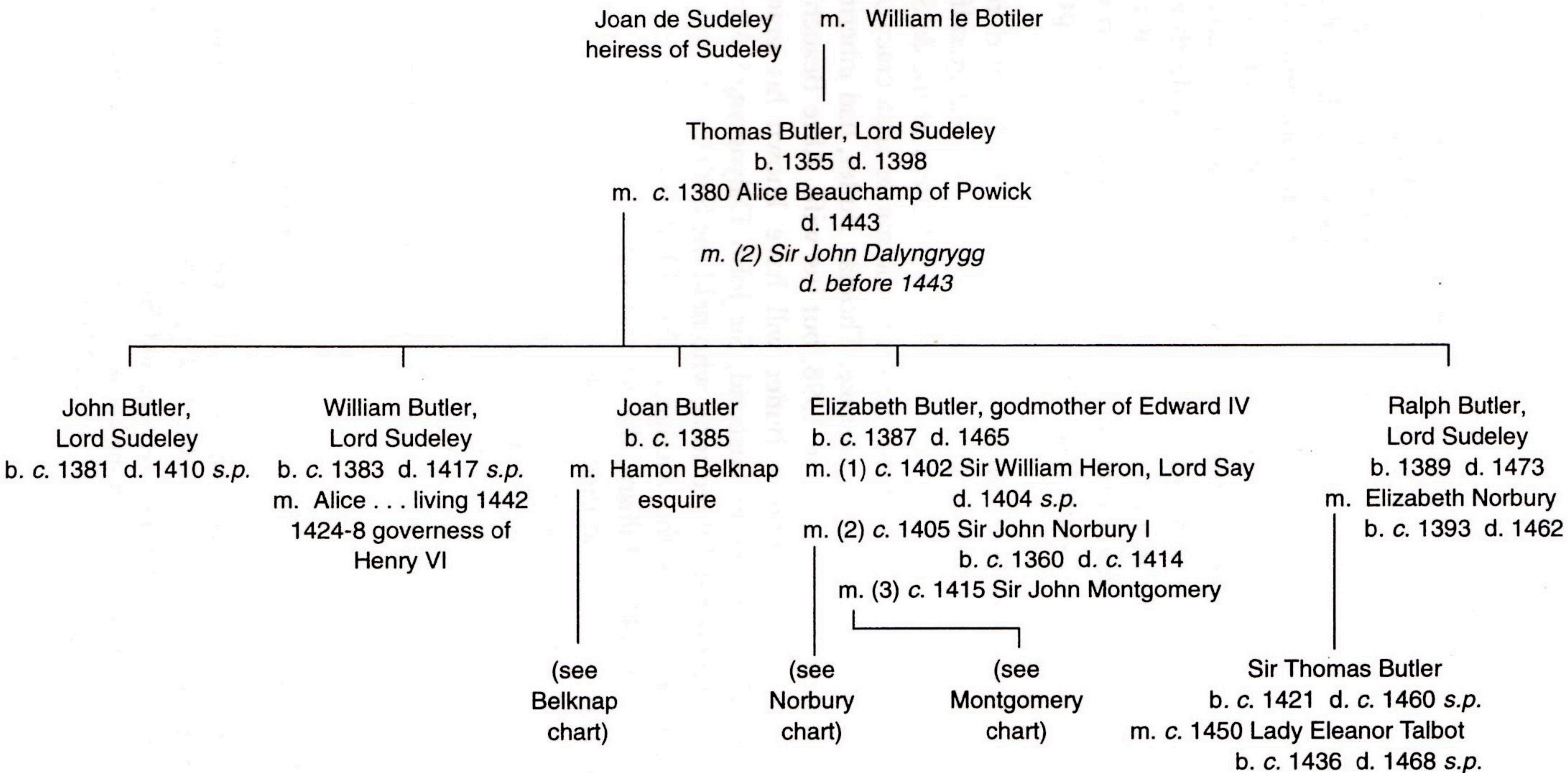
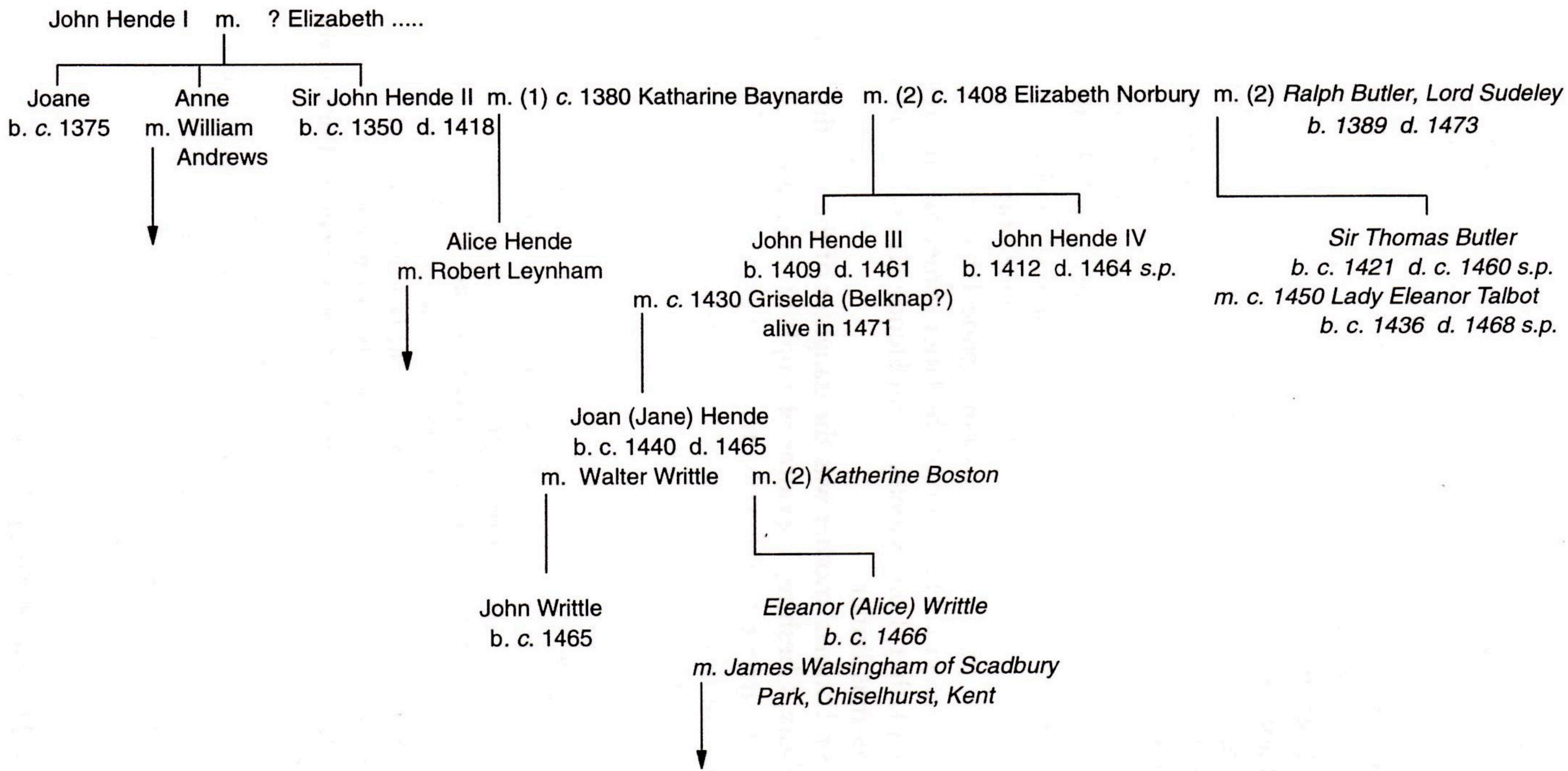


Fig. 2. THE HENDE FAMILY AND ITS CONNECTIONS



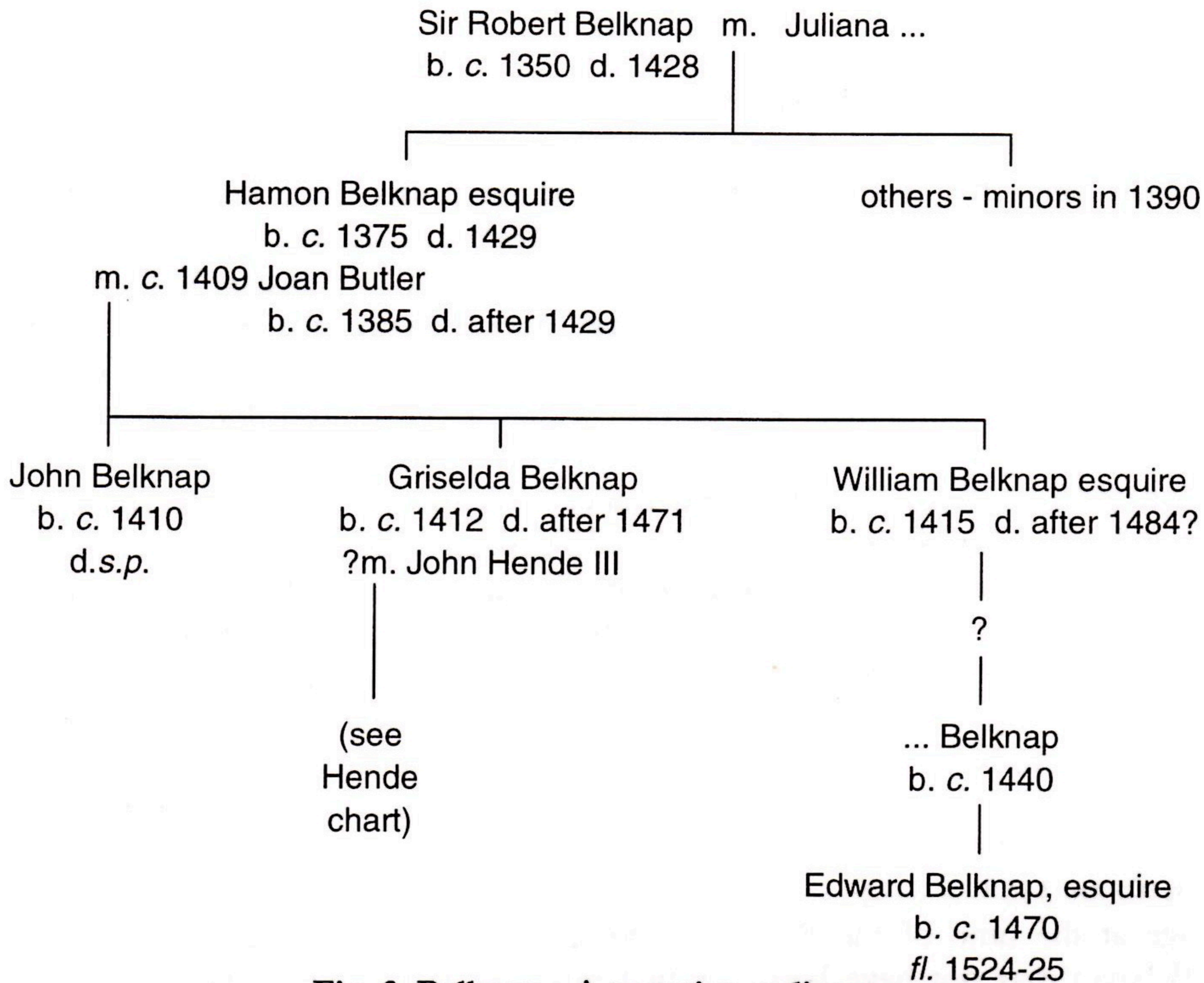
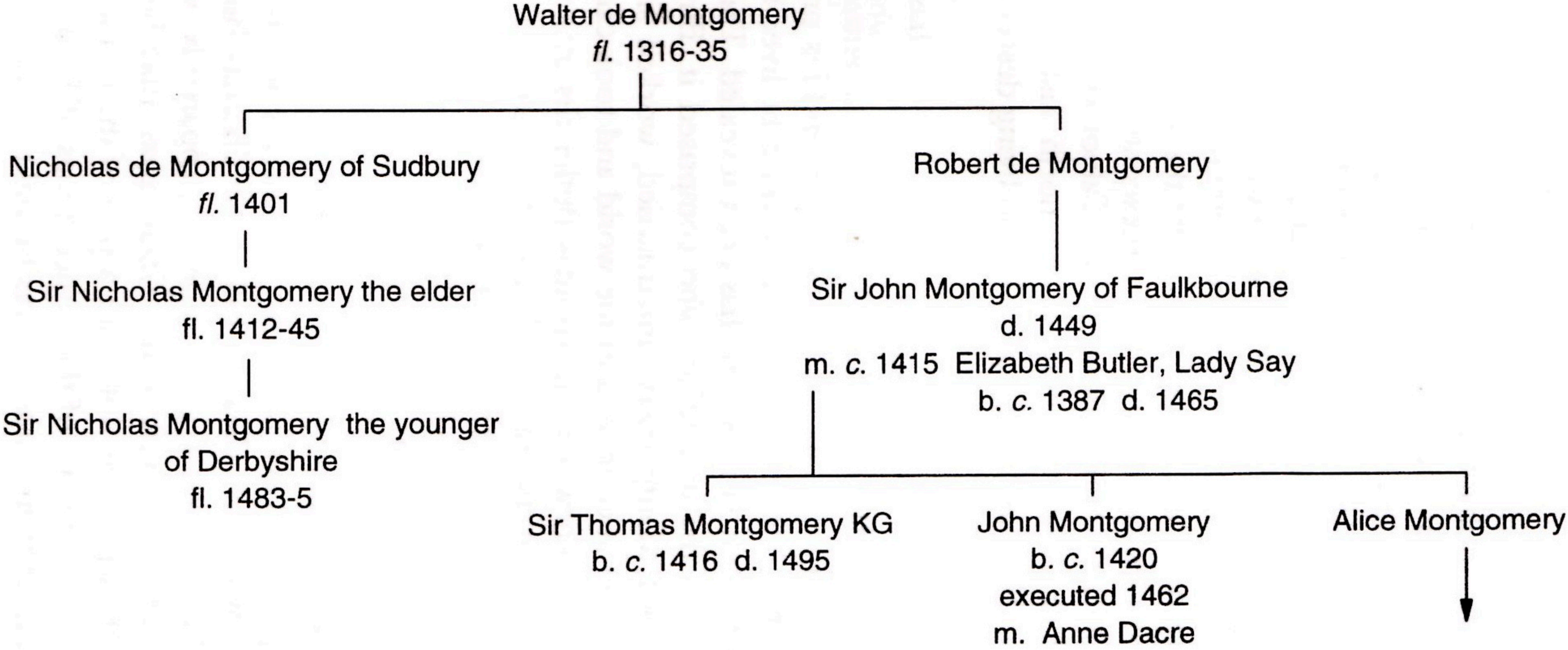


Fig. 3. Belknap – A tentative pedigree



Fig 5: Brass of Anne Norbury (née Crosier) and children.
Stoke d'Abernon Church, Surrey.
Anne was the wife of Sir Henry Norbury

Fig. 6. MONTGOMERY



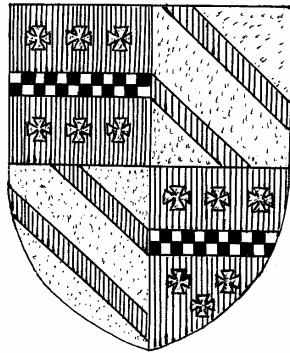


Fig. 7 Butler of Sudeley



Fig. 8 Hende

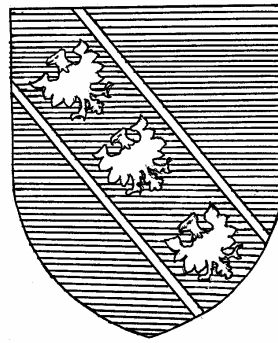


Fig. 9 Belknap



Fig. 10 Norbury

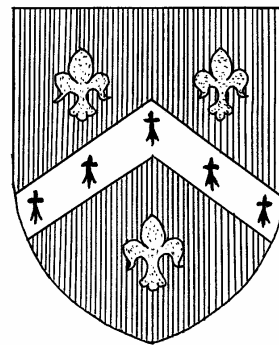


Fig. 11 Montgomery of Faulkbourne

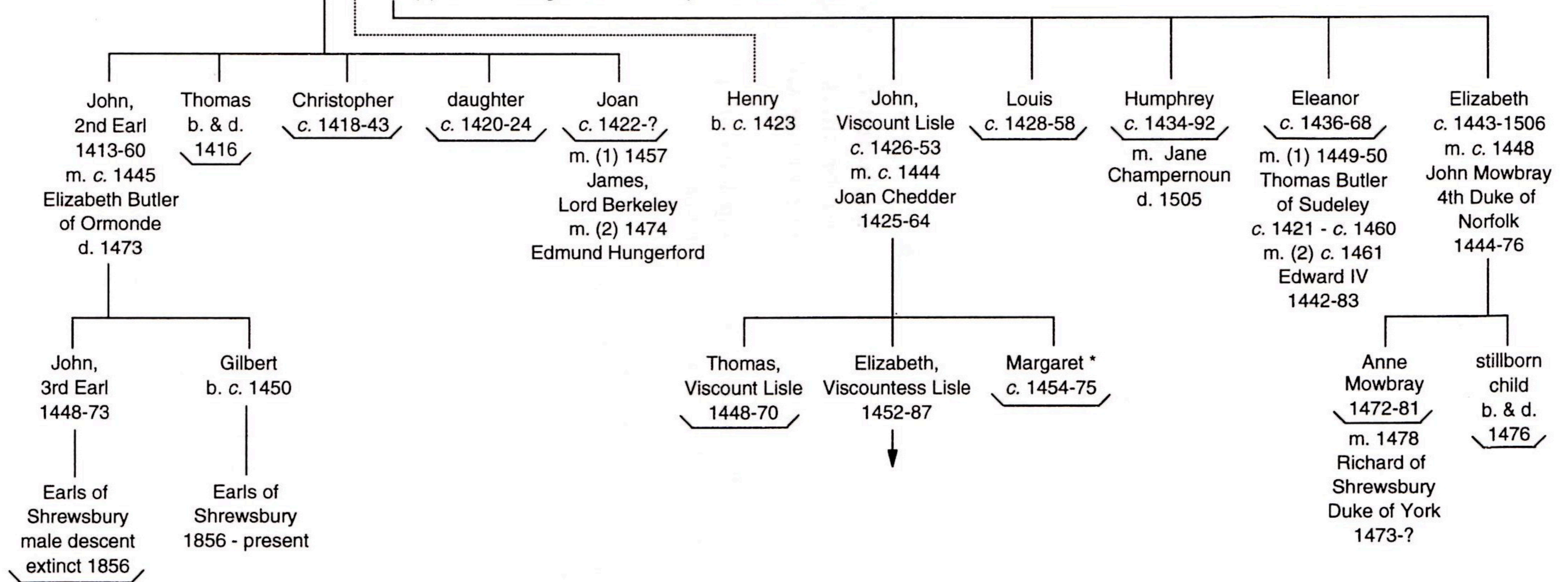
The Talbot Family

John Talbot, 1st Earl of Shrewsbury, c. 1387-1453

m. (1) c. 1405 Maud Neville of Furnival, c. 1390-1422

mistress (Alice Redman?)

m. (2) c. 1424 Margaret Beauchamp of Warwick, 1404-67



* ? posthumous child