

John Nesfield

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IN A SHORT notice in the *Ricardian*¹ the present writer noted most of the recorded activities of John Nesfield from 1478 until 1485, and suggested a link with Bishop Robert Stillington. Continued research has provided confirmation of this link, more information about his career, and some interesting possibilities regarding his possible family connections—although his parents cannot with certainty be identified.

He was in the service of Edward IV by 1471, being granted for life the office of Riding Forester of the Forest of Galtres in Yorkshire on 20th June. On the same day, with Sir Edmund Hastings, Sir Ralph Assheton, and John Athirton (Sheriff of Durham, 1462–6, and closely related to Sir Ralph), he was commissioned to arrest Thomas Gower (his predecessor as Riding Forester), Robert and George Gower, and others, chiefly men of Scarborough. Again with Sir Ralph he was commissioned, on 4th July, to arrest Sir Lancelot Threlkeld, Thomas Gower and others, including several of those same men of Scarborough. On 5th February, 1472, with Robert Nesfield (a brother?) and William Willesthorpe, he was commissioned to arrest several men of Godestre, Essex, and bring them before the king in chancery, and on 10th September he was similarly commissioned to bring in one Thomas Radley.²

These early notices of Nesfield, descriptive of quasi-military activities, and following so soon after Edward IV's recovery of the kingdom, suggest that Nesfield's sudden rise (Patent, Close and Fine Rolls are hitherto silent about him) was a reward for military service and that, like the Ryedale men, Assheton and Athirton, he had held fast to Edward's cause in 1469–71. Indeed, as we shall see, it is possible that he may have been one of those who assisted Edward IV's return to England in March, 1471.

Yet among these first notices we also find John, with Robert Nesfield, less strenuously employed, in the service of the Chancellor of England, Robert Stillington, Bishop of Bath and Wells. Indeed, the Bishop's name appears (in connection with the appointment of John Bracy as Abbot of Muchelney, in Somerset) on the very membrane which records Nesfield's appointment as Riding Forester.

On 21st December, 1471, Robert Wilson, bachelor in laws, was admitted to the Prebend of Timberscombe, in Somerset, in pursuance of a writ (recited) of Thomas Brian, certifying that John Nesfield, esquire, had recovered before the justices, against the Bishop of Bath and Wells and William Symson, clerk, the presentation to that prebend.³ In the following year, on 18th March,

John witnessed a land transaction involving three of the more prominent Wells clergy, Thomas Overay, Robert Wilson and Henry Aleyn, at Chiswick, one of Stillington's places of residence. On 16th April, 1472, the Sheriff of Norfolk's deputy was ordered to arrest Lawrence Hamerton, yeoman, of South Elmham, who was to appear in chancery to answer for a trespass against Robert Nesfield, servant of the Bishop of Bath and Wells.⁴

It is perhaps significant that on 20th March, 1472, the Gowers, Thomas and Edward—both of whom were to become staunch supporters of Richard III—were bound in £100 each to behave well towards the Bishop of Bath and Wells and his servants. The servants were very probably the Nesfields, and the trouble would therefore have stemmed from Nesfield's appointment as Rider of Galtres, an office held by Thomas and by his father before him. Stittenham, home of the Gowers, lay in the Forest, and even though Nesfield's duties there must have been performed by a deputy, friction was virtually inevitable. The Gowers were ordered to obey the arbitrament of William Hussee, the attorney general—whose mother was Elizabeth Nesfield, of Yorkshire, a factor which can hardly have inspired the Gowers with a belief in the judge's impartiality. The Hussee-Nesfield connection appears to be a significant one and we will return to it.

On 26th February, 1475,⁵ John Nesfield, 'late of London, esq., alias gentilman,' received a general pardon, and on 28th June, 1478,⁶ he and Bishop Stillington (who had been imprisoned in the Tower) each received a general pardon. Pardons and offences seem possibly to have been linked.

By 1480 Nesfield was serving at Calais. On 13th May, William Cely (of a family with estates in Essex and a thriving wool trade, especially with the Burgundian Low Countries) wrote from Calais to his brother George in Bruges: '... on the 12 May there was 2 Frenchman chased an English ship before Calais, and Federston and John Dave and Thomas Overton lay in Calais Roads but themselves were on land, and as soon as they saw them they got boats and went aboard and so did master marshall and Sir Thomas Everingham and master Nesseffylde with divers soldiers of Calais and rescued the English ship and took the Frenchmen.' A state of alert followed, any man dwelling outside the town being warned to 'remove his house as shortly as he can into the town.'⁷

Nesfield prospered under Richard III, who made him an Esquire of the Body and Constable of Hertford Castle,⁸ and chose him to watch over the Westminster Sanctuary, where Queen Elizabeth Woodville and her daughters sheltered. He was to be her attendant, with responsibility for her support—apparently for life.⁹ For his service against the rebels in 1483 he was rewarded with the forfeited Hungerford manor of Heytesbury, in Wiltshire.¹⁰ Either he was relieved of his responsibility for 'Dame Elizabeth Gray' or he was permitted a deputy, for during the summer of 1484 Nesfield, again with Sir Thomas Everingham, was once more fighting at sea. The two captains were captured by a Franco-Scottish force after a fight off Scarborough.¹¹ They were soon ransomed by the king. Everingham, of whom little has been told, was favoured by Richard III, who made him Lieutenant of the Tower of Ruysbank in Calais, and gave him the castle and borough of Barnstaple, and

much else in Devon, Somerset, Berkshire and Oxfordshire.¹² He is not heard of after Bosworth, and it is likely that there he was slain.

It is virtually certain that Nesfield fought for his king at Bosworth. Indeed, one of the figures—that between the Earls of Northumberland and Surrey—in the battle of Bosworth carving at Stowe,¹³ appears to represent him. The person represented bears upon his shield the arms, on a chevron between three mullets, as many fleurs-de-lis. One Thomas de Nesfield bore, *temp.* Richard II, the arms: on a chevron between three estoiles, as many fleurs-de-lis.¹⁴ Another Yorkshire Nesfield coat is: argent, a chevron between three mullets sable. The shield at Stowe appears to carry: argent, on a chevron (gules?) between three mullets sable, as many fleurs-de-lis of the first (or?). The tinctures at Stowe, through repainting, may not be altogether accurate. Indeed, the coat apparently meant for William Catesby is that of Catesby of Whiston, so too much reliance must not be placed on the heraldry there. The estoile, or star, and the star-shaped mullet, are easily confused (in Scotland the star is represented by an unpierced mullet), and the probability is strong that at Stowe we have the arms believed to have been borne by John Nesfield.

After Bosworth, Henry VII's agents attempted to obtain his goods which had been left in the possession of his attorney, John Norman of York (and of Hull), but were frustrated by Norman's wife, Agnes, and the York authorities. This appears to be the last notice recorded of Nesfield.¹⁵

John Nesfield cannot with certainty be identified in any surviving pedigree. Mature bachelors were then the exception, and as he appears as an obviously mature man in 1471, it may be assumed that he was born not much later than 1445. Yet the name of his wife does not appear. That he was a Yorkshireman seems reasonably certain, the name being derived from the village of Nesfield, in the district of Craven, and near Ilkley and Skipton. In 1483 the manor of Nesfield with its appurtenances was held by John Roucliffe (son of Brian Roucliffe, Baron of the Exchequer, by Jane Hamerton) and his wife, Margaret, daughter of William Plumpton.¹⁶ A junior branch of the Nesfields of Nesfield settled at nearby Flasby. There were also Nesfields at Hewick, near Ripon, Burnby, near Pocklington and (perhaps a branch of the Hewick family) at Scotton, near Knaresborough, and also several of the name active in Dorset. Nesfield alliances of the period 1450–1500 are of considerable interest, and several from the above families¹⁷ appear likely from their family and political allegiances, service to Richard III and resistance to Henry Tudor in 1487, to have been related in some way to John Nesfield. Yet two other alliances appear even more significantly to indicate a relationship with the soldier-sailor of Calais, Richard III's esquire for the body.

The first is the marriage of Elizabeth Nesfield 'of Yorkshire' to John Hussee of Old Sleaford, Lincolnshire.¹⁸ They had three sons, Sir William Hussee, King's Attorney-general, 1471–8, Serjeant-at-law, 1478–81, and Chief Justice of the King's Bench, 1481–95, Gilbert Hussee, appointed Receiver and Procurator general of Guisnes in 1478, and in 1483–5, and Thomas Hussee, perhaps the M.P. and commissioner (including the arrays of 1484) in Dorset. By Elizabeth Berkeley (of Wymondham, Leicestershire) Sir William was father

of John, first Lord Hussee, who was executed by order of Henry VIII, in 1537. Thomas was father of Peter Hussee, Archdeacon of Northampton (d. 1499), who in March, 1496, was, with Thomas Langton, Bishop of Winchester, John Hussee and Sir Thomas Tyrell, brother of Sir James, implicated in the alleged treason of John Kendall, Grand Prior of the Order of St. John,¹⁹ and Gilbert Hussee, who married the daughter of Richard Whetehill of Guisnes. Richard's son, Adrian Whetehill, the Comptroller of Calais, and Richard Whetehill were granted annuities by Richard III, on 25th March, 1485.²⁰ Of the children of Gilbert Hussee, senior, John died young, Jane married John Baude of Somerby, Lincolnshire, and Anne married Bernard Aungevine of Theddlethorpe, Lincolnshire. Another of his daughters, Margaret, was married, c.1485 (while he held office under Richard III at Guisnes), to Hugh Tyrell, son of Sir Thomas,²¹ and nephew of Sir James Tyrell, the then recently appointed Lieutenant of Guisnes.

It seems apparent, then, that Nesfield, whose association with Calais we have noted, was very probably related to the very 'aristocracy' of Calais. Moreover, it cannot escape notice that the man in whose custody Richard III had placed the widow and daughters of Edward IV, was connected—if perhaps not closely—with the supposed murderer of Edward's sons.

We should not overlook the fact that Jane, daughter of John Hussee of Sleaford, was married to John, younger son of Sir Richard Clervaux of Croft,²² whose kinship with the Yorkist kings has been demonstrated in these pages by Pauline Routh.²³

For the second alliance we must turn to Weardale, in the Bishopric of Durham. The Maddisons of Unthank Hall,²⁴ near Stanhope in the heart of Weardale, were of a family holding lands in Northumberland, Durham, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. Sir William Maddison, who fought at Agincourt in the retinue of Sir Gilbert Umfraville (known as the Earl of Kyme), married c.1421 Margery Wyclyffe.²⁵ His brother-in-law, Thomas Dalton, may have been the man of that name attainted by Edward IV in 1461. His eldest son, Alexander Maddison, married Anne, daughter of either Thomas Warde of Durham, or Sir Christopher Duckett. Margaret, daughter of Richard Duckett of Grayrigg, Westmoreland, was the wife of Ralph Brakenbury, nephew and heir male of Sir Robert Brakenbury, Richard III's Constable of the Tower.

William's second son, Thomas Maddison, married Eleanor, daughter of John Nesfield. As we shall see, the probability is strong that her father (or a brother) is our man. The fifth son, Christopher, married firstly Avisia, daughter and co-heiress of Richard Aungevine of Saltfleteby, Lincolnshire, and secondly Agnes, daughter of John Wyclyffe. Less than a mile from Unthank lies Stanhope Hall, seat of the Fetherstons, or Featherstonhaughs, of Stanhope, and home of William Fetherston of Stanhope,²⁶ Boston, Sandwich and Calais, one of the most notable of the Yorkist soldiers at sea, whose exploits included the fight off Calais already noted here, and the capture of the Earl of Oxford, whom he blockaded at St. Michael's Mount (1473-4). In 1480, as captain of the King's ship Falcon, with 140 seamen and 500 soldiers, he brought home to England the Duchess Margaret of Burgundy.²⁷ Thomas Fetherston of Stanhope,²⁸ like the famous Master Porter of Calais, Andrew

Trollop, was one of the Bishopric's casualties at Towton, and may also have been a Calais soldier. Yet, from 1461 until October, 1484, when he was ordered to seize men for the King's ship *La Marie of Grenewiche*, which the king had ordered to go to foreign parts, William Fetherston loyally served the Yorkist kings at sea. He was M.P. for Sandwich (one of the Cinque Ports) in 1483. Nesfield's old colleague Sir Ralph Assheton was commissioner of array for Dover and the Cinque Ports in 1484. That the Aungevines are found at this time in the pedigrees of both Hussee and Maddison—they were also related by marriage to the Cely family—together with the fact that Nesfield and Fetherston were not unacquainted, strengthens the probability that these Nesfield marriages relate to Richard III's esquire for the body.

Eleanor Nesfield's nephew, Lionel Maddison, heir to Unthank (aged 26), was thrice married, to ladies of the families of Emerson, Elrington and Swinburne—in that order. The Emersons of Eastgate (near Stanhope) were for generations Bailiffs of Wolsingham and Weardale, and Parkers of Stanhope. Lionel's third wife will have been related to Gilbert Swinburne, who died at Bosworth, fighting for the king, and whose elder brother, Thomas, was married to Margaret,²⁹ daughter and co-heiress of Robert Michelson of Offerton, Co. Durham, and of Hull, the man who, as captain of the Antony, brought Edward IV from Holland to regain this throne in 1471. It is not inconceivable that Nesfield's sudden appearance as a royal servant in 1471 followed service on that occasion. Richard III never forgot Michelson's service.³⁰

What may be a slender clue to the identity of Nesfield (or rather, perhaps, to his wife's) is to be found in the pages of Burke's *General Armory* where the family of Nevesfeld, or Nevetsfeld, is assigned the arms: vert, an eagle displayed or. These are the arms of John Hutton of Tudhoe and Hunwick, Co. Durham, another of Richard III's esquires for the body, dead by 20th March 1487,³¹ when Richard Hastings was permitted to marry his widow, Margaret, daughter of Thomas Chaunceler. Hutton (or Hoton) was closely associated with Sir Robert Brakenbury. One of his daughters and co-heiresses, Elizabeth, married William Hansard, son and heir of Richard Hansard of Walworth, Co. Durham, and South Kelsey, Lincolnshire who, like John Hutton, was one of Richard III's lieutenants in Hampshire.³² Of Richard Hansard's sisters, Alice married William Thirkeld (or Thelkeld), one of Richard III's serjeants-at-arms,³³ and Edith married Thomas (or Henry) Barde of North Kelsey, Lincolnshire. Hansard's daughter (or sister) Isabel³⁴ married Robert Claxton of Old Hall near Brauncepeeth, Co. Durham,³⁵ who was slain at Bosworth bearing the standard of Richard III, one of the relatively large number of knights and squires of the Bishopric who died for Richard at Bosworth. Their service is too seldom acknowledged—but was not forgotten by Henry VII. Hansard's other daughters, Margaret and Katherine, were married to John Clervaux of Croft and John Snawzell of Bilton, respectively. The families of Claxton, Hutton, Hansard, Brakenbury and Radcliffe were, then, closely connected by many marriage alliances. It would hardly be surprising were we to learn that John Nesfield was allied to one of these families. Yet, while we may surmise that Nevesfeld, if identifiable with Nesfield, inherited (as did the Hedworths) these arms through marriage to one of John Hutton's

daughters, the *General Armory* is not altogether reliable, and without firm evidence this conjecture must remain tantalisingly unconfirmed.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Ricardian*, Vol. 4, No. 52 (March, 1976), p.27.
2. *Calendar of the Patent Rolls 1467-77*, H.M.S.O. (1900), pp.263, 286, 287, 318, 377.
3. *The Registers of Robert Stillington, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1466-91, and Richard Fox, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1492-4*, Somerset Record Society (1937), n.531, p.89.
4. *Calendar of the Close Rolls 1468-76*, H.M.S.O. (1953), Nos. 899, 913. Robert Wilson, a Yorkshire lawyer, was Chancellor of Wells Cathedral in 1472. His name headed the lists of witnesses to Stillington's Acts, 1470-78. He was a Canon of Wells in 1471. Overay was Precentor of Wells. Henry Aleyn, Vicar of Weston-super-Mare, was Notary Apostolical and Imperial, 1471.
5. *C.P.R. 1467-77*, p.483.
6. *C.P.R. 1476-85*, H.M.S.O. (1901), p.102.
7. Alison Hanham (editor), *The Cely Letters 1472-1488*, Early English Text Society, London (1975), pp.104-5 (spelling modernised). John Dave was a Yeoman of the Crown, and like William Federston (*vide infra*) an experienced fighting seaman. Thomas Overton (d. 1488) was from Sandwich, Master Marshall was Sir Humphrey Talbot, the Marshal of Calais.
8. *C.P.R. 1476-85*, pp.448, 460.
9. British Library *Harleian Manuscript 433*, f.308b.
10. *C.P.R. 1476-85*, pp.448, 485, the second grant included other properties in Wiltshire. All were forfeited by Walter Hungerford.
11. *Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland*, translated by H. T. Riley, London (1893), p.497.
12. *C.P.R. 1476-85*, pp.460, 428.
13. For the Stowe carving see: Geoffrey Wheeler, Bosworth and the Artist, Part 1, *Ricardian*, No. 37 (June, 1972), pp.3-7. Since this carving is undoubtedly no older than the late sixteenth century (the latest date proposed in the article) and may be more recent, this is interesting evidence for it embodying a genuine historical tradition. A clearer photograph of the carving appears in the Pitkin booklet on Richard III.
14. J. Foster (editor), *The Visitation of Yorkshire 1584-5, etc.*, London (1875), p.278, from a seal of Thomas de Nessfield, temp. Richard II.
15. Angelo Raine (editor), *York Civic Records*, Vol. 1, Yorkshire Archaeological Society (1939), pp.160-63.
16. *B.L. Harl. MS. 433*, f.278 (dated September, 1483).
17. Hungate, Constable of Flamborough, Pulleyn of Scotton, Slingsby and Babington; see forthcoming article on Joyce Percy. Further information on these alliances is available from the Society Library.
18. *Lincolnshire Pedigrees*, Vol. 2 Harleian Society (1903), p.526; J. C. Wedgewood, *History of Parliament 1439-1509*, Biographies, H.M.S.O. (1936), pp.488-9.
19. R. J. Knecht, The Episcopate and the Wars of the Roses, *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, Vol. 6 (1958), p.127.
20. *C.P.R. 1476-85*, p.527.
21. Wedgewood, *op. cit.*, p.488; *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem, Henry VII*, Vol. 1, H.M.S.O. (1898), No. 883.
22. Foster, *op. cit.*, p.413.
23. Kin of Kings, *Ricardian*, No. 30 (September, 1970), pp.13-14.
24. *Lincolnshire Pedigrees*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p.623. The families of Maddison, Conyers, Wycliffe, Aungevine, Cely and Hussee were closely linked by marriage.

25. It was possibly William Maddison's eldest son who married Margery Wycliffe.
26. *C.P.R. 1476-85*, p.287 (a general pardon, 25th September, 1482).
27. Wedgewood, *op. cit.*, p.321.
28. Robert Surtees, *The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham*, Vol. 1, London (1816), p.lix. Stanhope Hall, unusual and largely mediaeval, remains, as does Unthank, which is mostly of the seventeenth century.
29. Surtees, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p.278.
30. *C.P.R. 1476-85*, p.509. Richard III granted him an annuity of £10 (from Michaelmas, 1483) on 6th February, 1485.
31. *Testamenta Eboracensia*, Vol. 3, Surtees Society (1865), p.352.
32. Hutton was given lands in Co. Southampton (Hants.) forfeited by Sir William Berkeley, made Constable of Christchurch Castle, Commissioner of Array, Hants. Hansard was made Constable of Odiham Castle and Commissioner of Array, Hants. His lordships were Walworth, Co. Durham and South Kelsey, Lincolnshire.
33. Made serjeant-at-arms for life by Richard III, c.April-May, 1484: *B.L. Harl. MS. 433*, f.64.
34. According to the pedigrees in Surtees, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p.299, she was Richard's daughter, but as Robert Claxton was perhaps as much as fifteen years older than Hansard it is likely that she was a sister.
35. The Claxtons of Old Hall were heirs of the Umfravilles, related to the Daltons and, distantly, to the Maddisons by marriage.

Details of the families allied to the Nesfields (see note 17), omitted for reasons of space, are available from the Society Library.

BISHOP STILLINGTON'S CHAPEL AT WELLS AND HIS FAMILY IN SOMERSET

Apologies are due to Mr. W. E. Hampton for an accidental omission from his article of the above title in the March issue of the *Ricardian* (pp. 10-16). In this article Mr. Hampton originally showed that the arms used by Bishop Stillington were: Quarterly, 1 and 4, argent, a chevron between 3 leopards faces sable langued gules; 2 and 3, gules, on a fess between 3 leopards faces or, 3 fleurs-de-lis azure.