

Preparations for Edward IV's Return from Exile

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IN MARCH 1471 Edward IV, returning from exile in the Low Countries, landed at Ravenspur on the East Yorkshire coast. A feature of his subsequent advance through Yorkshire was the inactivity of the Earl of Northumberland—an inactivity tantamount to support under the circumstances since Northumberland was the dominant lord in the East Riding.¹ Edward IV had been in contact with the Earl before his return, in circumstances illustrated by a document surviving among the Duchy of Lancaster records. This is a brief list of the expenses incurred by Nicholas Leventhorpe, Edward's messenger. In June 1471 Edward authorised Leventhorpe's repayment and the list is attached to the royal warrant ordering the auditors of Tickhill (Yorks.) to settle the debt. Leventhorpe's mission has been referred to in print more than once, but his expenses are interesting enough to warrant printing in full.²

Leventhorpe came from a family with a long tradition of service within the Duchy of Lancaster. The family originated in Yorkshire, in the Leeds/Bradford area: a region dominated by the Duchy interest. Early in the fifteenth century a junior branch had moved into Hertfordshire and settled at Shingle Hall in Sawbridgeworth. The move was probably a consequence of the family's Duchy connections. The Duchy of Lancaster included estates in the county, notably Hertford itself, and the Hertfordshire Leventhorpes remained active in the Duchy administration there and over the border in Essex, where they also founded a

branch of the family.³ Nicholas, the messenger of 1470, came from the Yorkshire side of the family and his home seems to have been at Bramham.⁴ At the time of his embassy to the Earl, Leventhorpe was one of Edward IV's yeomen of the Chamber and already launched on a Duchy career. In 1467 he had been made receiver of the Duchy honour of Knaresborough.⁵ The honour lay near the Percy lordship of Spofforth, which perhaps helps to explain the choice of Leventhorpe as messenger to the Earl.

After Edward IV's restoration Leventhorpe's career continued to develop along the lines laid down by 1470. He collected further Duchy office, culminating in his appointment as receiver-general of the Duchy in 1477. He also rose within the royal household, ending the reign as usher of the Chamber, a post he almost certainly continued to hold under Richard III although he is nowhere formally described as such.⁶ Alongside this professional advancement, Leventhorpe's personal standing also improved. In 1476 he married Katherine, the widow of Richard West, Lord de la Ware.⁷ Katherine was the daughter of Robert Lord Hungerford, executed by the Yorkists after the battle of Hexham in 1464, and thus the sister of Walter Hungerford, one of the 1483 rebels against Richard III.⁸ This family connection, together with his administrative experience, explains the relative ease with which Leventhorpe transferred to Henry VII's service after Bosworth. He died in 1500.

One of Leventhorpe's colleagues in the Duchy administration is also mentioned by name in the bill of expenses. This is Sir Ralph Ashton, whose servant accompanied Leventhorpe back to the Low Countries. Ashton was a younger son of the Ashtons of Ashton under Lyne (Lancs.) and his own estates lay at Middleton in the same county.⁹ His Duchy connections were with the honour of Pickering, where he had been made receiver and forester in the first year of Edward's reign. Ashton was in Edward's Household by 1471 and his sympathies had clearly been with Edward IV rather than the Nevilles during the restoration of Henry VI in 1470-1.¹⁰ The Readeption government dropped him from all commissions, although there is insufficient evidence to show whether he actually accompanied Edward IV into exile. After his restoration Edward IV signalled his confidence in Ashton by giving him a major role in the commissions set up to arrest Warwick's northern associates.¹¹

For the remainder of Edward's reign Ashton received no major marks of royal favour. Some of his energies may have been going into providing for his family, by 1476 his eldest son, Richard, had been placed in the royal household.¹² During this period, however, Ralph, like many other royal servants in the Duchy, was being drawn into the orbit of the Duke of Gloucester, who had been made chief steward of the Duchy in the north in 1471. Ralph Ashton's association with Gloucester bore fruit after Richard's accession in 1483. Ashton, a knight of the body, became one of the new King's leading agents in Kent, where he had acquired his own interests by marriage to Elizabeth Chichele, the widow of John Kyriel. Among other patronage he was rewarded with land in the county worth over £115.¹³ The reign represents the peak of Ralph's fortunes. He escaped attainder after Bosworth but does not seem to have enjoyed royal favour thereafter. He died at some time after 1486, leaving behind an unsavoury local reputation.¹⁴

The role of these two Duchy servants in the circumstances surrounding Edward's return is a reminder that the north was not entirely hostile to Edward IV in 1471. Although Edward was disappointed by the turn out in the north, which was officially blamed on the continuing Lancastrian sympathies of the region, there were royal servants there who were prepared to rally to him. Many of the men who made an early commitment to the Yorkists in 1471 held office in the Duchy of Lancaster, among them John Pilkington and Sir James Harrington, who joined Edward at Doncaster and Nottingham respectively.¹⁵ Numerically the Duchy contribution to Edward's forces in 1471 was probably not large, what is significant is that it was made at all. Since his accession Edward IV had filled the Duchy offices with his own supporters, many of them members of his household. This had neutralized the traditional sympathies of the Duchy but, by 1470, had brought a new danger. Edward IV's main agent in the northern Duchy lands was Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, by 1470 Edward's opponent. Warwick was chief steward of the Duchy in the north and steward and constable of the individual honours of Pontefract, Knaresborough and Pickering. In 1471, however, Warwick failed to mobilize the Duchy resources in his own support. Leventhorpe and Ashton, the receivers of Knaresborough and Pickering, actively supported the exiled Edward IV. Even more striking is the example of Ralph Snaith, the bailiff of Pontefract. Warwick's brother John had been put in command of that honour during the Readeption but Snaith not only managed to join Edward IV, he brought with him £30 from the revenues of Pontefract.¹⁶ John Neville's failure to engage Edward IV on his march through Yorkshire must have been due, at least in part, to an awareness that he could not rely on Duchy support. The northern servants of Edward IV can thus take much of the credit for immobilizing the two major noble threats to Edward IV's advance into the Midlands in 1471.

Text of Public Record Office: Duchy of Lancaster DL 37/47A/2¹⁷

Expenses made by Nicholas Leventhorpe coming in the King's message from the Hague in Holland unto the Earl of Northumberland and over again to his highness to Middelburg in Zeeland.

First the said Nicholas at his landing at Tynemouth being taken there by John Beell and his fellowship gave to the said John to the intent that he should keep the same Nicholas secret and bring him from Newcastle such men as he desired to speak with the sum of 66s 8d.

And after that the ship in which the said Nicholas came over the sea being arrested at the New castle, he took his shipping in a corver¹⁸ at Dundee in Scotland, where he paid for his freight and his servant 30s.

Item, where the said corver was five days in the¹⁹ and could in no wise pass, but came into the haven at the lithe, the said Nicholas hired there a carvel that would go nigh the wind, wherein he paid for his freight and his servant and a servant of Sir Ralph Ashton £4.

Total — £8 16s 8d

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Charles Ross, *Edward IV* (1974), pp.161-4.
2. Public Record Office: Duchy of Lancaster DL 37/47A/2, printed below. R. Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster I* (1953), p.256 n.2, where he confuses Leventhorpe with his Duchy colleague Nicholas Sharpe; T. B. Pugh, The magnate, knights and gentry, in *Fifteenth-century England 1399-1509*, ed. S. B. Chrimes, C. D. Ross and R. A. Griffiths (Manchester 1972), p.126. The date of Leventhorpe's mission is unrecorded, but the reference to The Hague suggests that he sailed some time in autumn 1470 when Edward was based there: Mariëke Lulofs, King Edward IV in Exile, *Ricardian* 44 (March 1974), p.10.
3. P. W. Kerr, The Leventhorpes of Sawbridgeworth, *Transactions of the East Hertfordshire Archaeological Society* 9 (1934-6). The John Leventhorpe who was a yeoman of the crown of Richard III was from the Hertfordshire side of the family.
4. PRO: C67/50 m. 1.
5. PRO: DL 29/482/7777; Somerville, p.526.
6. *Ibid.*, p.400; PRO DL 42/19 f. 101v. Temp. Richard III Leventhorpe is described only as 'king's servant' but his continuation in all his Duchy offices makes it likely that he kept his position in the household.
7. *Calendar of Close Rolls 1476-85*, no. 75.
8. W. E. Hampton, *Memorials of the Wars of the Roses* (Upminster 1979), no. 305.
9. E. Baines, *The History of the County Palatine and Duchy of Lancaster* (5 vols. 1888-93, a new edition by James Croston) II, pp.307, 390, 397.
10. PRO: DL 29/500/8100; DL 37/47A/1.
11. *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1467-76*, pp.286, 287.
12. PRO: DL 28/5/11 f. 2.
13. *CPR 1476-85*, pp.445, 482-3.
14. Ashton's harshness has passed into folklore: W. E. A. Axon, *The Black Knight of Ashton* (Manchester 1870); K. M. Briggs, *A Dictionary of British Folk Tales* (4 vols., 1971) Part B, vol. 1, pp.47-9.
15. PRO: DL 37/47A/4; Pugh, p.109.
16. PRO: DL 37/47A/7, 8. For Snaith's will see *Testamenta Eboracensia* III, *Surtees Society* 45 (1864), no. 60.
17. This document is crown copyright and the transcript appears by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Spelling and punctuation have been modernized.
18. *OED* defines corver as a type of Dutch fishing boat; the context here supplies the additional detail that its rig did not allow it to sail close into the wind.
19. *Sic.*, firth should perhaps be supplied here.