

## Gloucester Branch Study Day: The Berkeley Family In The Late Fifteenth Century

This happened on Saturday June 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Steam Railway Museum in Swindon. It's an excellent venue, spacious and comfortable. Those who didn't go missed hearing some very entertaining speakers who know their Berkeleys inside out!

I was made very welcome by the Gloucestershire Branch members and Doug Weeks from Kent. The day was well organised with breaks for tea or coffee and biscuits, and plenty of places for lunch nearby.

Anton Bantock opened the meeting, concentrating on \* Thomas the Magnificent, the tenth Lord Berkeley, who lived during the fourteenth century, setting the scene for what was to follow: the dispute over the Berkeley inheritance in the fifteenth century, culminating in the battle of Nibley Green, and the longest legal quarrel in history, only settled in the reign of King James I!

Thomas married Margaret, heiress of Lord Lisle. Their daughter married Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick. They had three daughters but no sons. So the castle passed to Thomas's younger brother James, the eleventh Lord Berkeley. His son William, the twelfth Lord, fought the battle against Viscount Lisle.

The eldest of the three daughters of Richard Beauchamp married John, Lord Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, and her son and grandson, the Viscounts Lisle, pushed their claim to Berkeley Castle. She also had a daughter, Eleanor Talbot, who married Edward IV.

Dr Peter Fleming explained the Berkeley links with Bristol, which led to strong support from the town for William Lord Berkeley at the battle of Nibley Green in March 1469. It was the last private pitched battle on English soil, and may not be listed as one of the battles of the Wars of the Roses, but it was between Lancastrians and Yorkists. Lord

Berkeley was Lancastrian and Viscount Lisle, who lost his life at the battle, was Yorkist. Dr Fleming believes those involved seized the chance to settle the dispute by battle while Edward IV was busy with rebellions of his own.

There are several reasons for the connection between the Berkeleys and Bristol: -

William's younger brother married the daughter of one of Bristol's leading merchants and mayor; the Berkeleys owned lots of property there and some members of the family are buried in the cathedral; they gave lots of money to churches such as St Mary Redcliffe (Redcliffe was once a Berkeley manor); the Berkeleys and Bristol were both Lancastrian.

William Lord Berkeley sat on the Gloucester Bench during the Lancastrian re-adeption but was not given any responsibility by Edward IV until he had purchased a pardon in 1474, and paid the widow of Viscount Lisle an annuity. She was Margaret, daughter of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, one of Edward's most trusted supporters.

William Herbert lost the battle of Edgecote in 1469 and was executed on the orders of Warwick and Clarence, together with his brother. Bristol helped Warwick and Clarence as they fled Edward's wrath. Warwick left his guns and baggage there.

The town gave men and equipment to Margaret of Anjou's army on its way to Tewkesbury in 1471. It's likely the army spent part of the night at Berkeley Castle.

Once Edward was secure upon the throne again in 1471 the town had to ask for a pardon with the help of Clarence, who had changed back into a Yorkist again.

Certain people were excluded from this pardon: Bristol's Recorder Nicholas Hervey, who fought and died for the Lancastrians at Tewkesbury; John Bodie, who was accused of killing Viscount Lisle at the battle of Nibley Green; John Shipwood, who was accused in 1479 of looking after money in 1471 belonging to Clarence and Warwick, and Robert Strange, who was accused the same year of minting money

to support Henry Tudor. One of the earliest references to Henry as a source of trouble.

After lunch, Anton Bantock returned to tell us more about the dispute with the Talbots (see \* page 23).

Warwick was high in favour with Kings Henry V and Henry VI, and laid siege to Berkeley Castle while James, the eleventh Lord, and his sons were there. The Talbots were also in favour and the Countess of Shrewsbury had William's mother <sup>1</sup> locked in Gloucester Castle until she died. James retaliated by attacking the Countess of Warwick and her daughters as they returned from a trip, and also by seizing three valuable manors in the Cotswolds, part of the Berkeley inheritance which had been given to Warwick.

Peter Fleming described how eventually Viscount Lisle challenged William, the twelfth Lord Berkeley, to prove his prowess and knighthood with a duel.

Berkeley replied that a duel would not legally settle the dispute over ownership and inheritance, but agreed to meet for a battle, and took the initiative by naming the place (Nibley Green), the date (the next day) and the time ( eight or nine o'clock). He added that he wouldn't bring along one tenth of the men available to him!

Chris Scott finished the day with an account of the battle, in March 1469. Edward IV was busy with uprisings in Lincolnshire and the treachery of Warwick and Clarence, and had no time for private quarrels. Berkeley was a nasty man and it was a mistake for Lisle to let him name the day and time, as Berkeley had his brothers and their retainers staying with him, together with seven professional soldiers. He'd also dispatched a message for help to Bristol, and the men arrived overnight in Michaelwood forest.

Lisle only had his tenants who wouldn't own armour nor have many weapons, and Talbot men, so Chris Scott estimated he had about 300 men all together. Berkeley had about 1000.

Berkeley's men were concealed in the forest, an acceptable Wars of the Roses tactic. If Lisle realised his opponent's strength he

wouldn't attack. Lisle appeared on top of a ridge, and Berkeley sent out about 250 archers, to fire up at Lisle's men.

Lisle thought he could win with a downhill charge, but was knocked off his horse by an arrow in the face in the first rush. Berkeley's men at arms, including John Bodie, fell on him, to kill him with daggers through the side joints of his armour.

Many of Viscount Lisle's men were killed while fleeing uphill towards the church for sanctuary. The Earl of Warwick had said to kill the nobility and spare the commons, which suited Berkeley.

Viscount Lisle's wife miscarried shortly after his death, and the title passed to the Grey family, who continued the fight in the law courts.

I had to leave then but thought you'd find the following interesting:

William Lord Berkeley gave his interest in some Norfolk estates to Richard, Duke of York, Edward IV's youngest son, in 1477. If York died without heirs, the interest reverted to the king and his male heirs, and if there were none, it reverted back to Berkeley. It was not anticipated that this situation would arise so soon in the future!

Edward in return agreed to release James (William's father) and his sons from the ransom of about £34,000 demanded by the Countess of Shrewsbury when she and her husband released them from prison.

Edward had been married to the sister of Viscount Lisle, the daughter of the Countess of Shrewsbury (Eleanor Talbot).

When the Duke of York's wife Anne Mowbray died in 1481, he inherited *her* Norfolk properties as well as the Mowbray manors which were his from Lord Berkeley.

Edward IV created William Viscount Berkeley and made him one of his privy council in 1482.

Richard Duke of York was declared illegitimate, and his titles were re-granted by Richard III. <sup>2</sup> William Viscount Berkeley became Earl of Nottingham, and John Howard became Duke of Norfolk. Berkeley was present at Richard's coronation, and received all his Mowbray manors back when Richard died at Bosworth.

Pam Benstead

<sup>1</sup> William, the twelfth Lord Berkeley, was the son of Isabel Mowbray and James, the eleventh Lord Berkeley. Isabel had been married before to Henry, Lord Ferrers of Groby. Their daughter married Edmund Grey, and their grandsons were: Sir John Grey who married Elizabeth Woodville, and Sir Edward Grey who married Elizabeth Talbot.

<sup>2</sup> Much speculation of course about whether the Duke of York was dead when his titles and lands were given elsewhere, or whether Richard simply considered him no longer eligible for them.