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Edited by Joan Kirby

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

Because of the instability of the Borders the northern counties were more highly militarized than those of the Midlands and South, and the martial *esprit de corps* of the northern gentry, fostered by frequent border skirmishes and more prolonged periods of conflict, earned them a widespread reputation for bellicosity and savagery. But despite their portrayal by John Whethamstede and others as ‘alien and barbarous’,¹ northern magnates and greater gentry were not a provincial race apart. Like their great rivals the Nevilles, the landed estates of the Percies, stretching southward into Sussex, gave them a significant presence in the South. Similarly, those greater knights who held lands in distant counties usually found it necessary to establish a second residence as a centre for the estate, and a political presence for its protection, whilst their social horizons were further extended by military and administrative service abroad. Sergeants-at-law and other leading lawyers from northern gentry families, like John Vavasour, Brian and Guy Palmes, Robert Constable and Richard Pigott, operated at Westminster, accumulated fees and retainers from many sources, and served on a variety of royal commissions. In the West Riding of Yorkshire the king, as duke of Lancaster and lord of the honors of Pontefract, Knaresborough and Tickhill, was by far the greatest nobleman, albeit an absentee, whose lordship was therefore exercised by the local noble and gentry élites functioning as its brokers and managers.²

The chance survival of a single, late medieval northern letter collection is of obvious interest and importance for the study of a region whose political influence was disproportionate to the size of its adult population, which was only 15 per cent of the total recorded for the poll tax of 1377.³ Although concerned largely with matters of business, the Plumpton Letters, addressed mainly to Sir William Plumpton (1404–80) and his son Sir Robert (1453–1525), show that the northern gentry shared to the full the concerns and characteristics of contemporary

¹ Thos. Wright (ed.), *Political Poems and Songs* (2 vols, Rolls Ser., 1859–61), ii, 262–3; J.S. Davies (ed.), *An English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI* (Camden Society, LXIV, 1856), 107, 109; N. Pronay and J. Cox (eds), *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations 1459–1486* (1986), 191.

² S.J. Gunn, Review of C. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401–1499*, *The Historical Journal*, xxxv (1992), 999.

³ H.M. Jewell, ‘North and South: The Antiquity of the Great Divide’, *NH*, xxvii (1991), 17–18.

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landowning society: acquisitiveness, ruthless exploitation of the law, use of credit to sustain an opulent life-style and the burden of crippling marriage portions – components in the unending struggle to maintain and increase the family's wealth and standing: to avoid at all costs its descent into 'the bottomless pit of oblivion'.

First heard of in 1166 as holders of a knight's fee of the Percy barony of Spofforth, the Plumptons are known in the earlier period through their numerous charters. The family's Yorkshire estates lay in Plumpton, a riverside settlement on the eastern boundary of the forest of Knaresborough, and in and around Steeton, Idle, Grassington and Studley.⁴ In c.1402 a turn in their fortunes raised this ancient, but comparatively modest, knightly family to the front rank of the county gentry: the marriage of Sir William's father, Sir Robert (d.1421) to the sole heiress of the Nottinghamshire knight Sir Godfrey Foljambe, of Kinoulton. Alice Foljambe brought her husband some eleven manors and numerous scattered estates in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire, of which only the valuable manor of Kinoulton, where the family had established a second residence as an administrative centre, continued to be held in demesne by the mid-fifteenth century.⁵ When the manor was eventually leased meticulous arrangements were made with the tenant for the occasional accommodation of the Plumptons and their officials.⁶ An incomplete valuation of 1479 assessed the estate, including the Yorkshire lands, as worth a clear £290 14s 3½d.⁷

The family attracted the notice of the chroniclers as a consequence of the execution in 1405 of Sir Robert's father for complicity in the ill-fated rebellion of his uncle, Richard Scrope, archbishop of York. Notwithstanding the gruesome aftermath – Sir William's head displayed on Micklegate Bar at York – the family avoided the penalties of attainder, and were soon receiving favours from the king, who treated them with remarkable clemency.⁸ Sir Robert himself sailed with Henry

⁴ Th. Hearne (ed.), *Liber Niger Scaccarii* (1774), i, 317. The early history of the family is recounted in Stapleton, ix–xxxvi. See also J.S. Purvis (ed.), *The Chartulary of the Augustinian Priory of St John the Evangelist of the Park of Healaugh* (YASRS, XCII, 1936); E.M. Holt, 'Study of Ancient Fields (Medieval) with Specific Reference to Early Estate Maps in the Pennine District' (unpub. M. Phil. thesis, University of London, 1974), 105.

⁵ CB, 294, 313; 17 below. Kinoulton was let at farm by 1476, CB, 681–2.

⁶ App.II, 50.

⁷ App.I, 4.

⁸ G.L. Harriss and M.A. Harriss (eds), 'John Benet's Chronicle for the Years 1400 to 1462', *Camden Miscellany*, XXIV (1972), 176; C.L. Kingsford (ed.), 'A Northern Chronicle 1399–1430', in Idem, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 1913), 282. The inscription on his tomb, formerly in Spofforth church, is recorded in CB, 664. The question arises why Plumpton incurred the death penalty when a number of other knightly insurgents were pardoned, C. Given-Wilson, *The Royal Household and the King's Affinity: Service, Politics and Finance in England 1360–1413* (1986), 218.

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V on the king's first expedition to France, in company with John, duke of Bedford, returning thither in 1418 accompanied by a man-at-arms and two archers, this time under Lord Fitzhugh, whom, earlier the same year, he had appointed one of his feoffees in indentures for securing the provisions of his will. At home he succeeded his grandfather Sir Robert Plumptre (d.1407) as steward, castellan and master forester of Knaresborough, and was returned three times to Parliament, twice for Yorkshire and once for Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. As he did not obtain possession of Plumptre until his grandmother's life interest ceased with her death (1419/20), he and his wife settled at Kinoulton. He died in 1421, probably in France, leaving an eighteen-year-old son, the future Sir William.⁹

Sir William Plumptre

Born on 7 October 1404, William, aged twelve, was betrothed to the twelve-year-old Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Brian Stapleton of Carlton (d.1417), his father paying 20 marks a year for the pair to be brought up together in Sir Brian's household.¹⁰ On the death of Sir Robert the earl of Northumberland held custody of the family's Yorkshire estates during the few remaining years of William's minority.¹¹ Between 1427 and 1430 the young man saw service in France and received knighthood; five years later he enlisted under the duke of Bedford, distinguishing himself sufficiently to be rewarded with the *vicomté* of Falaise.¹² In accepting knightly status Sir William incurred, as its ineluctible burden, the 'obligatory grandeur' imposed upon knightly families by the expectations of society. Though in this period a dubbed knight was usually one whose ancestors had traditionally taken knighthood and could still afford it,¹³ the margin between income and expenditure for even the wealthiest gentry was small. All suffered from an endemic shortage of cash, and many tried to make a profit out of usury, whose prevalence was reflected in the business of the court of common pleas, which was overwhelmingly concerned with cases of debt.¹⁴ Sir William's creditors

⁹ Somerville, i, 523, 525, 527; A. Gooder (ed.), *The Parliamentary Representation of the County of York, 1258-1832* (2 vols, YASRS, XCI, 1935; XCVI, 1938), i, 174; *CPR*, 1416-20, 250; CB, 368, 384, 397, 399; Stapleton, xlvii-ix; J.S. Roskell, L. Clark and C. Rawcliffe, *The House of Commons 1386-1421*, iv (1992), 90-2; App.II, 4-6.

¹⁰ CB, 361, 374, transcript in Stapleton, xliii-iv.

¹¹ App.II, 7.

¹² Joseph Stevenson (ed.), *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Wars of the English in France* (2 vols, Rolls ser., XXII, 1861, 1864), i, 433; *CPR*, 1441-46, 203.

¹³ C. Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages* (1987), 18.

¹⁴ Margaret Hastings, *The Court of Common Pleas in Fifteenth-Century England* (Ithaca, NY, 1947), 26-27; 165.

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grew tired of prevarication, clamoured for money and issued writs of *exigi facias de novo*, whilst he himself engaged in the same tortuous business of pursuing defaulting debtors through the courts.¹⁵ Nevertheless, their crenellated mansion, enclosed park,¹⁶ private chapel and commemorative chantries¹⁷ proclaimed to all the wealth, pride, and credit-worthiness of the Plumptons. But with predators always on the lookout for chinks in the security of titles, and the hazards of a political crisis, stretching from the mid-century onwards, that aggravated the discords and uncertainties of a society based on land Sir William forged defensive alliances with important local families through the marriages of his three sons and seven daughters. Thus were the Cliffords, Darrells and Middletons, Aldburghs, Goldsburghs, Beckwiths and Gascoignes,¹⁸ traditional allies of the Plumptons, drawn into a kinship network intended to provide him with reliable feoffees and well-willers. He was supported also by kinsmen whose sons were employed as stewards – Godfrey Greene, steward of the Yorkshire estates, Geoffrey Towneley, German de la Pole and Robert Girlington came of minor gentry families related to the Plumptons – and by his illegitimate son ‘Robinett’ a shrewd lawyer with a practice in York, who served the family’s interests loyally as confidante and adviser. The household included a number of trusted upper servants like Thomas Bickersteth, Henry Fox and Oliver Diconson, who acted as counsellors, witnesses and executors, confidential messengers and estate officials, whilst two clerks, John Ellis and John Whixley may have been employed as secretaries.

Furthermore, the letters suggest that both Sir William and his successor not only had the degree of familiarity with writs and the intricacies of legal process deemed necessary for self-preservation, but also exerted themselves by summoning influence and favour, labouring jurymen, and, in general, preparing the ground. Lawyers feed by them from time to time included luminaries like Sergeants Yaxley, Fairfax

¹⁵ E.g. 6–8; *CPR*, 1467–77, 327; *ibid.*, 1476–85, 185; Joan W. Kirby, ‘A Fifteenth-Century Family, The Plumptons of Plumpton and their Lawyers’, *NH*, xxv (1989), 107–8.

¹⁶ The licence for crenellation and emparkment is dated 17 Feb. 1473, CB, 585.

¹⁷ The chapel at Plumpton, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, was said to be near the manor house, *Test. Ebor.*, iii, 335, 209. Sir William Plumpton (d.1362) founded a chantry dedicated to the Holy Trinity behind the high altar in the minster church of Ripon, App.II, 1. Ellen de Gisburn, mother of Alice Plumpton, widow of Sir William (exec.1405), founded the chantry of the Blessed Nicholas in St Martin’s church, Micklegate, York in May 1396, App.II, 2. In his will, dated 14 Nov. 1450, George Plumpton, clerk, endowed a chantry at the altar of St Mary Magdalene at the east end of the north aisle of the nave in the parish church of Spofforth, known as the Plumpton Quire, CB, 520; George E. Kirk, *The Parish Church of All Hallows (All Saints), Spofforth, Yorkshire, and the Chapels of Follifoot, Little Ribston, Plumpton and Stockeld* (Shipley, 1958), 12–13; University of Leeds, Brotherton Library, Archives of the Dean and Chapter of Ripon, MSS, 1.1.

¹⁸ CB, 541, 570, 555, 579, 534; App.II, 11, 13, 17.

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and Frowyke, and other experienced men of court with local practices and Westminster connections, such as Edward Plumpton, William Elleson and Thomas Strey. Sir William's attorneys included his nephew, Godfrey Greene of Newby, who juggled with his client's numerous lawsuits, making brazen use of suspect procedures, like the *supersedas*, and such legal loopholes as would further his client's matters and impede the ploys of his adversaries. Sir William, like most gentlemen, preferred, for the most part, to pursue his social inferiors – the prior of St Robert's, Parson Dromonby, Hargreve of Fewston, Robert Dykeson, husbandman, and John Daste, labourer, for example, rather than embark on the hazardous path of legal proceedings against the great and powerful.¹⁹

Disaster struck in March 1461 with the death on Towton field of Sir William's last surviving son, also named William, leaving two daughters by Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas, Lord Clifford. In consequence, the Plumptons were faced with partition of the estate between the two co-heiresses. Although tail male may not have been the generally accepted practice among landowners that it became towards the end of the century, the passing of an inheritance to a female heir or heirs was a prospect dreaded by those for whom the preservation of the family name was thought to be of overmastering importance. As an infant Elizabeth Clifford had been carried into the chapel of Skipton Castle for her betrothal to William's elder brother, Robert, who died in July 1450.²⁰ Her marriage to William followed in 1453 in accordance with a clause in the first marriage contract which provided for such a contingency.²¹ By this time Sir William's first wife was dead and he was living with a lady named Joan Wintringham, to whom he afterwards claimed to be clandestinely married. Their son, afterwards Sir Robert, was born in 1453.²²

Not lacking the egocentricity that 'often lay behind the devotion men of his kind gave to local affairs', Sir William became the quintessential administrator-knight, wielding local influence as steward, castellan and forester of Knaresborough and steward of the Percy lordship of Spofforth (for which his fee was increased from £10 to £20).²³ He also served in the three major public offices of justice of the peace for the

¹⁹ **18, 27, 28**; *CPR*, 1467–77, 327; *ibid.*, 1476–85, 185.

²⁰ CB, 437; App.I, 2.

²¹ App.II, 16. There is no record of the second marriage in the CB.

²² See below, p.9.

²³ *DNB*; Somerville, i, 524, 525; App.II, 10, 12. He had been granted the stewardship etc. of Knaresborough for life, *RP*, v, 347. Until 1308/9, when they acquired Alnwick, Spofforth had been the caput of the Percys' northern estates, E.J. Fisher, 'Some Yorkshire Estates of the Percy Family 1416–1537' (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds, 2 vols 1955), i, 12.

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West Riding (which enhanced his local standing as the only justice resident in the Knaresborough area),²⁴ MP for Nottinghamshire (1436–7), Yorkshire county representative at the abortive Great Council summoned for May 1455,²⁵ sheriff of Yorkshire in 1447–8, and of Nottinghamshire four years later.²⁶ As a royal commissioner he was entrusted with a variety of tasks, including array, river management, and inquisition into the estates of attained Yorkists.²⁷ But he lacked the formidable combination of influence at court and power in the country that led to the aggrandisement of such contemporaries as the Stanleys, Cliffords and Tiptofts; perhaps his prime loyalty to the Percies caused him to be regarded with suspicion by kings who mistrusted the earls but had perforce to suffer them. Moreover, private acts of violence in the interests of his patrons earned him the disapproval of the government, as when he and others, at the behest of the third earl of Northumberland, executed Richard Neville, earl of Salisbury, in revenge for the death of the earl's father at St Albans.²⁸ Some twenty years earlier, during a protracted quarrel between the Percies and John Kemp, archbishop of York, he was called to account for having encouraged the rebellious foresters of Knaresborough, intent on asserting their immunity from payment of toll, in bloody combat with the archbishop's towns of Otley and Ripon.²⁹

The Plumptons were probably uncharacteristic, even in the north-east, where the gentry 'were more successful than some at balancing loyalty with self-interest', in their commitment to their lords and patrons, which drew them into the Lancastrian orbit and cost them loss of life, liberty and office. Elsewhere many gentlemen were more pragmatic – even cynical – in their response to claims on their loyalty, and showed a 'marked reluctance to become involved in the dangerous

²⁴ CPR, 1436–41, 594; *ibid.*, 1441–46, 482; *ibid.*, 1446–52, 598; *ibid.*, 1452–61, 683; *ibid.*, 1467–77, 638; *ibid.*, 1476–85, 579–80; Carol Arnold, 'The Commission of the Peace of the West Riding of Yorkshire', in R.A. Griffiths and James Sherborne (eds), *Kings and Nobles in the Later Middle Ages: A Tribute to Charles Ross* (Gloucester, 1986), 119–20.

²⁵ *Return of Members of Parliament*, 330; R.L. Storey, *The End of the House of Lancaster* (1966), 160–1.

²⁶ *A List of Sheriffs for England and Wales* (PRO, Lists and Indexes, ix, 1898), 103, 162.

²⁷ CPR, 1429–36, 520; *ibid.*, 1441–46, 369; *ibid.*, 1446–52, 88; *ibid.*, 1452–61, 408, 560; *ibid.*, 1467–77, 55, 349, 355, 408, 572; *ibid.*, 1476–85, 50; CFR, 1430–32, 350, 355; *ibid.*, 1445–52, 169; CB, 545 (enquiry concerning the lands of the attainted Richard, duke of York, 1 May 1460).

²⁸ Storey, 194; P. Jalland, 'The Influence of the Aristocracy on Shire Elections', *Speculum*, xlvii (1972), 47, 487; CCR, 1461–68, 135.

²⁹ Catherine Pulein, *The Puleins of Yorkshire* (Leeds, 1915), 45; R.A. Griffiths, *The Reign of Henry VI: The Exercise of Royal Authority, 1422–1461* (1981), 578; CCR, 1441–47, 98; *ibid.*, 1454–61, 101; CB, 455–58. There is a transcript of this account of the riots in Stapleton, liv–lxii.

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national politics of the day'.³⁰ By contrast, Sir William Plumpton was one of the few to be ejected from the commission of the peace in August 1460 because of his hostility to the Yorkists.³¹ After the rout of the Lancastrians at Towton in March 1461, with the third earl of Northumberland slain and his son attainted and in custody, Sir William resorted to self-preservation. Brought before Edward IV at Newcastle, he agreed to pay £2,000 as a recognizance for good behaviour, but was unable to raise the sum and in July was confined in the Tower.³² The following February he obtained a pardon, and in September release from his bond on condition that he remained in London.³³ Further trouble befell him, however, for he was accused by an informer of treasonable words, tried, acquitted, and pardoned anew by signet letter, dated 20 January 1463/4.³⁴ Meanwhile, Warwick having been granted the stewardship of Knaresborough for life, Sir William hastened to make his peace with the earl, possibly through the good offices of the latter's brother-in-law, Henry, Lord FitzHugh, and was rewarded by appointment as Warwick's deputy.³⁵ It appears that he also resumed the stewardship of Spofforth, presumably replacing Sir Robert Constable who had been granted the office on 8 August 1461.³⁶

The restoration of Henry Percy as fourth earl of Northumberland in March 1470 doubtless revived Sir William's latent Lancastrianism. For some reason, possibly an injudicious move during the crisis of 1469–71, whilst the earl shrewdly 'sat still', he was ousted from the deputy stewardship of Knaresborough,³⁷ but looking for reinstatement on Percy's succession to Warwick as steward of the honor, his fury on discovering that the earl had chosen instead to confer the favour on his brother-in-law, Sir William Gascoigne, gave rise to a deluge of

³⁰ Susan Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century* (Derbyshire Record Society, VIII, 1983), 75, 101; Keith Dockray, 'Sir Marmaduke Constable of Flamborough', in J. Petre (ed.), *Richard III, Crown and People* (Richard III Society, 1985), 218; Christine Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 498–514.

³¹ Arnold, 122, 125–6; J.R. Lander, *English Justices of the Peace, 1461–1509* (1989), 44.

³² CB, 549 (recognizance, 13 May 1461), 550 (imprisonment, 12 July 1461), transcripts in Stapleton, lxviii and n. He was said to have been captured by the earl of Warwick, James Gairdner (ed.), *Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles* (Camden Society, 2nd ser., XXVIII, 1880), 161.

³³ 8 App.II, 19.

³⁴ App.II, 26.

³⁵ A.J. Pollard, *North-Eastern England During the Wars of the Roses* (Oxford, 1990), 288–9, 293.

³⁶ E.J. Fisher, 'Some Yorkshire Estates of the Percy Family', i, 36; CPR, 1461–67, 39.

³⁷ J. Bruce (ed.), *Historie of the Arrwall of Edward IV in England and the Finall Recouerye of his Kingdomes from Henry VI A.D. Mccccxxi* (Camden Society, I, 1838), 7. Pollard suggests that Sir William's dismissal followed Warwick's loss of office, *NE England*, 139. He received a pardon for offences committed before 30 Sept. 1471, CB, 578, transcript in Stapleton, lxxv n.

instructions to his attorney to urge his cause in the highest quarters.³⁸ Northumberland remained unmoved, but did intervene to secure Plumpton's reinstatement on the commission of the peace.

After his acquittal in January 1463/4 Sir William turned his attention to an important domestic matter: he received 400 marks and £333 respectively, from Brian Roccliffe and Henry Sothill for the marriages of Margaret Plumpton, aged four, and her younger sister Elizabeth, the daughters of his deceased son William, on the understanding that they were co-heiresses to the Plumpton inheritance. The tightly-drawn Sothill marriage contract, with its protective indentures, conditions, deadlines and contingency clauses, included a clause forbidding the alienation by enfeoffment of any part of the Plumpton estate. Hence Sir William was precluded from providing other than a life annuity for a future son. Should there be a son, his wardship and marriage were guaranteed to Henry Sothill on payment of 100 marks on the day of his delivery into Sothill's keeping, and 100 marks within the year following.³⁹ By this time, however, Sir William had indeed a second wife (if later testimony can be believed) and a son, aged about ten.⁴⁰ Understandably, he had been in no hurry to reveal the secret of his marriage, but on being summoned to appear before the Official of the civil court at York on 26 January 1468 to account for the irregularity of his private life, he then declared that Joan Wintringham had for long been his lawful wife, and that their only child had been born in wedlock.⁴¹ Proceedings were interrupted by the political disturbances of 1469–71, and it was not until 6 July 1472 that the case was resumed, and the court heard the crucial deposition of the parish clerk of Knaresborough who claimed to have witnessed the ceremony.⁴² Upon this evidence Dr William Potemen (significantly, perhaps, Northumberland's godfather) certified the validity of the marriage and the legitimacy of the young Robert, who was thereafter recognized as his father's heir apparent.⁴³ The cartulary contains copies of the deeds of conveyance and settlement, dating from October 1475, by which Sir William enfeoffed all his estates to his own use, with reversion to his son. Having thus supplanted the heirs general,⁴⁴ he defaulted on the final clause of his contract with Henry Sothill by signing indentures, dated 13 July 1477, for Robert's marriage with Agnes, sister of Sir

³⁸ 28, 29.

³⁹ App.I, 3; II, 23.

⁴⁰ See below, p.14.

⁴¹ App.II, 30.

⁴² CB, 582, 631, transcripts in Stapleton, lxxvi–vii.

⁴³ App.II, 33.

⁴⁴ App.II, 35, 36.

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William Gascoigne.⁴⁵ In the following year he made absolute dispositions of his entire estate, real and personal, to his son, so precluding the necessity for a will.⁴⁶

By these means Sir William's carefully-contrived purpose was accomplished. Impelled by pride of lineage and determination to secure its continuance in undiminished standing, he subjected his second wife to years of humiliation (although in the circumstances she might not have been an altogether unwilling accomplice) and defrauded his granddaughters. Their disposal has indeed been much criticised on the ground that it was motivated merely by greedy concern for financial gain; but whatever the motive, the sin of the father was amply visited upon the son.

Sir Robert Plumpton

Through the good offices of Sir William Gascoigne⁴⁷ the escheators, William Nettleton, for Yorkshire, and Edmund Pierpoint, for Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, acted quickly to hold their inquisitions and return their findings to the court of chancery. The deeds of settlement of 1475 having been submitted in evidence, Robert Plumpton's title as his father's heir was admitted, and the status of Margaret Roccliffe and Elizabeth Sotehill, then aged about twenty and nineteen, respectively, as heirs general acknowledged.⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, however, the latter, their husbands and supporters were already embattled, and a few months before Sir William's death Northumberland and Gloucester agreed to arrange a settlement through the good offices of their respective councils.⁴⁹ Sir William's death, and political events supervened to postpone a determination of the cause, and it was another three years before Richard of Gloucester, now King Richard III, delivered his judgement, which awarded to the heirs general a lawful estate in Grassington and Steeton and in twenty-one Derbyshire lordships, whilst the Plumptons were to retain the residue,

⁴⁵ App.II, 37.

⁴⁶ App.II, 38, 39.

⁴⁷ CB, 625 (30 Nov. 1481), transcript in Stapleton, lxxxvii.

⁴⁸ App.II, 42-44.

⁴⁹ App.II, 41. On 7 Nov. 1476 the heirs general obtained exemplifications of fines made respectively by Sir William Plumpton's paternal and maternal grandparents. A copy of the former, dated Oct. 1326, is in CB, 173. The latter was made in Trinity 1366, *CPR*, 1467-77, 601-2. In neither case were the lands entailed in the male line.

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including the valuable Nottinghamshire manor of Kinoulton.⁵⁰ Unhappily for the Plumptons this did not prove to be the last act in the drama.

As closely identified with the Percies as his father had been, Robert was knighted by Northumberland in August 1481 while on campaign against the Scots.⁵¹ Succeeding his father as steward of Spofforth, he was also appointed deputy steward, castellan and master forester of Knaresborough under the earl – offices Sir William may have regained before his death.⁵² Unlike his kinsmen Sir Christopher Warde, Sir Stephen Hammerton and Sir Piers Middleton, Sir Robert received no favours from King Richard, and therefore easily transferred his allegiance to Henry VII in 1485. In the following year he rode in Northumberland's train to meet the new king at Barnsdale during the royal progress to York, and afterwards was in attendance on the earl at the coronation of Henry's consort, Elizabeth of York.⁵³ In April 1489 he performed his latest personal service to his patron during the mysterious affair at Cocklodge, near Topcliffe, where the earl was lynched by the mob within sight of his formidable retinue. Contemporary writers cried shame on all but the few, including Sir Robert, who attempted to rescue him; but it is suggested that many of his followers as former annuitants of Richard of Gloucester bore a deep grudge against Northumberland for his inaction on the battlefield at Bosworth.⁵⁴ In May 1492 Sir Robert received his sovereign's special thanks for service in the field, under Thomas Howard, earl of Surrey, against the northern rebels at Ackworth.⁵⁵

Soon after the betrothal of his eldest son, William, aged twelve, in May 1496, to Isabel Babthorpe, the young heiress to Sir Ralph Babthorpe of Osgodby, Sir Robert heard from his attorney, Edward Plumpton, the unwelcome news that the powerful lawyer-administrator Richard Empson, seizing, perhaps, the opportunity afforded by the fifth earl of Northumberland's minority, proposed to bring an action of

⁵⁰ App.II, 48. The original document, with the king's sign manual and the seal of the privy signet (now missing) is preserved among the Hastings MSS, *Historical Manuscripts Commission*, Series 78 (4 vols, 1928–47), i, 283, transcripts in R. Horrox and P.W. Hammond (eds), *British Library Harleian Manuscript 433* (Richard III Society, 4 vols, 1979–83), iii, 133–6; R.B. Smith, *Land and Politics in the England of Henry VIII: The West Riding of Yorkshire: 1530–46* (Oxford, 1970), 292.

⁵¹ M.A. Hicks, 'Dynastic Change and Northern Society: the Career of the Fourth Earl of Northumberland, 1470–89', *NH*, xiv (1978), 107.

⁵² 52; Given-Wilson, *Nobility*, 101.

⁵³ 47; *DNB*; John Leland, *De Rebus Britannicis Collectanea*, ed. Thomas Hearne (6 vols, 1874), iv, 185–7, 229–33.

⁵⁴ M.A. Hicks, 'The Yorkshire Rebellion of 1489 Reconsidered', *NH*, XXII (1986), 39–42; 74; John Skelton, *Complete English Poems*, ed. V.J. Scattergood (1983), 31.

⁵⁵ 107.