

ART. XIII – *The Lowther Younger Sons: a seventeenth century case study.*

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THE problem of gentry younger sons was a favourite topic of seventeenth century writers, who mourned that under the English practice of primogeniture they were deprived of a share of their father's estate.¹ Their destiny was to idle at home, too proud to be a servant, too poor to be independent, unable to marry, living on the dubious generosity of their eldest brother.² The literature suggests that the only alternative to moping at home in genteel indigence was, as in so many folk tales, to leave home and seek one's fortune. In folk tales such a venture usually ends happily; in real life, seventeenth century writers assure us, reality often proved harsher.

Joan Thirsk suggests that in contemporary literature "younger son" was a shorthand way of expressing a host of grievances and resentments much as "angry young man" was in the 1950s. However, she believed that to determine how far these literary stereotypes express the reality of the fate of younger sons "more family histories that take all children, and not merely the eldest, into their purview are sorely needed".³ This study of the Lowther family in the seventeenth century seeks to help to meet that need. In the absence of such studies, modern historians have tended to take the seventeenth century grumblers at face value. Professor Tawney has described younger sons as "martyrs of prudent egotism", and claimed the English system kept the gentry "few and tough" by sacrificing the individual to the estate.⁴ Lawrence Stone noted that many sons of the lesser gentry, and even some sons of the greater gentry and noblemen, went into trade, although he insists that this would cost them their gentility, but this, he observes, only applied to younger sons "who were anyway regarded as expendable".⁵ However, we must beware ascribing to seventeenth century squires notions that have only been dominant since early Victorian England, particularly the notion that trade was an impossible career for a gentleman. In the seventeenth century, C. V. Wedgwood reminds us, "men were not separated by class but connected by degree".⁶ Seventeenth century gentry did not consider apprenticeship as unsuited to gentleness, nor did several contemporary writers who insisted that it involved no more than a temporary suspension of gentility which ended when the apprenticeship was concluded.⁷ It was not making a martyr of a son, nor treating him as an "expendable" sacrifice to family aggrandisement, to apprentice him to a wealthy merchant. Rather it was an expensive but responsible way to launch him into the world.

Did then seventeenth century fathers really see younger sons as expendable, as liabilities, as burdens which might erode their family's status by dissipating their estates? Were younger sons regularly abandoned by their fathers and elder brothers to a hostile or indifferent world? Were they allowed to "drift" into commerce, the Church or Low Country soldiering by indifferent parents? While the following examination of a group of families belonging to the Lowther "clan" cannot definitively answer such questions for the country as a whole, it certainly demonstrates that the literary stereotypes of the period should be treated with caution.

When any family is examined it is important to define what kind of family it was. Was

'it *parvenu*? Rising? Falling? Ancient? Are we concerned with the greater gentry – those knights or baronets who might marry their children into the ranks of the nobility if they chose, and who often owned manors in more than one county? Or are we rather concerned with a minor family, its head some unpretentious *hobereau* owning perhaps one modest manor and a few extra tenements and pastures scattered about his district; his family connections tending to be with prosperous yeomen whose condition much resembles his own and often threatens to surpass it?

The Lowthers of Cumberland and Westmorland, whose estates were to grow to straddle also Yorkshire, Lancashire and Durham during the seventeenth century, were both “ancient” and “greater” gentry. Sir John Lowther of Lowther, first baronet (1605-1675) has been described as the “thirtieth knight” of the family “in an almost direct line”.⁸ The family provided many public officials, including knights of the shire, from at least the late thirteenth century, and over the centuries the family supplied some 70 members of the unreformed House of Commons. Sir Hugh Lowther was one of Edward I’s attorneys-general, and was later a judge in King’s Bench. The family was connected by marriage to that great aristocratic clan, the Cliffords, earls of Cumberland, and to virtually every important gentry family in the two counties. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the family far outdistanced their neighbours, with two Lowthers raised to the peerage and another reputed the richest commoner in England, but this extraordinarily acquisitive family was no *parvenu* mushroom. As seventeenth century “rising gentry”, the Lowthers were rising from an ancient and substantial base.⁹

In 1603 the head of the family was Sir Richard Lowther (1532-1607), for many years Elizabeth I’s Deputy Lord Warden of the West March.¹⁰ He had a large family, at least seven children surviving to adulthood. Two daughters married into gentry families. Of the five surviving sons one, Sir Gerard, was a justice of the common pleas in Ireland; a second, Sir Lancelot, was a baron of the Irish Exchequer; a third, Hugh, was a soldier who finally ran Sir Gerard’s Fermanagh estates based on Fort Lowthertown; and the youngest, William became a Yorkshire squire.¹¹ Thus all of Sir Richard’s adult sons were successfully launched into careers. Sir Richard’s chief problem was not his younger sons, but rather the eldest, Sir Christopher¹², a hot tempered man who was on bad terms with his father chiefly because of the provision Sir Richard had made for Christopher’s younger brothers. This was not due to Christopher’s obsession with the estate nor because his father’s policy was contrary to Christopher’s marriage settlement, but more importantly because he himself had many younger children to provide for. Sir Christopher’s own eldest son, John, claimed later that the harmony of the family “had almoste broken in peces by the discord betwixt my father and grandfather” and that he had to pacify his choleric elders.¹³ Bad relations between father and eldest son were to be a recurring theme in the various branches of the Lowther clan and the tradition did not begin here. Sir Richard’s own grandfather had disinherited his eldest son, and settled the estates on Richard. This precedent Sir Richard proposed to follow, but his grandson, John dissuaded him, “to my great danger after his death”. Instead he persuaded his grandfather to “estate it all . . . upon my father for life, then to me for life, then upon my sonne John intayle”. He adds significantly “this was still out of my care that my brothers should be brought up like gentlemen, and that I might give testimony of my love and duty to all men”.¹⁴ Some settlement of this kind must have must have been

made. Sir Richard's will is merely a brief formal document making no reference to the estates.

Sir Richard, however, was very long lived and his eldest son's financial problems were severe, for he had himself fathered a very large brood of children, six of whom were sons grown to adulthood during their grandfather's lifetime. Of these Gerard (1583-?) died fighting the Turks in the King of Poland's army; the third son Richard and the fifth son William were professional lawyers; the fourth son Christopher and the sixth son Lancelot were both appointed rectors of Lowther livings in Westmorland.¹⁵ The seventh son, Robert (1595-1655) was apprenticed to a London merchant, became a merchant himself and alderman and subsequently the lord of the manor of Marske, North Riding of Yorkshire.¹⁶ However, historically the most important son was the eldest, John (1582-1637), the peacemaker between his father and grandfather. Patriarchal both as a father and eldest brother, he was the very epitome of the shrewd, ambitious, worldly squire who was determined to set his family on a successful course. Thanks to his memoranda, autobiographical fragments and interrogatories addressed to his sons, we can form a picture not simply of his purposes, but of his attitudes, his preconceptions, his very cast of mind.¹⁷

Sir John did not regard younger sons as a dangerous liability likely to destroy an estate, and would have been appalled by the suggestion that they were "expendable". This is striking because as a witness of the difficulties of his father and grandfather he knew the problems of providing for many children. With five offspring of his own, he had to discharge burdensome responsibilities to younger brothers long after they should have been fending for themselves. In particular his efforts on behalf of his ungrateful youngest brother Robert provide a useful corrective to the literary stereotype of an eldest brother. John paid Robert annuities after their father's death, ensured that he, along with the other sons and daughter, benefited from the burdened and reduced estate he had inherited. He paid Robert's apprenticeship fees, financed his freedom of the Merchant Adventurers, provided him with funds to launch himself in business, sent him to Ireland to spy out prospects of profit, and apprenticed his own third son William to him at a fee of £200. At the same time John helped other siblings, and paid annuities to certain of his uncles. To free the estate from his stepmother's rapacity he waived some financial obligations due to him – to his cost but to the family's benefit.¹⁸

Under these burdens, it would not have been surprising if the Lowther estates had been dissipated, and the family had disappeared into obscure indigence. In fact under John Lowther's stewardship both the family and the estates began their spectacular leap forward. Lowther might well have become as niggardly a supporter of primogeniture as any found in the contemporary literature. Instead his vision of the family remained unwarped. In 1612, when his sons were infants, he began to write for them a long, rambling memorandum, part autobiography, part homily. There he states he will daily pray that God will increase their number and their prosperity, for a large family is a divine blessing, like a "brode spradding and fruitful vine". Of course he hopes that God, having provided the family, will also help to sustain it because the close connection between family, wealth and status is quite clear to Sir John:

Without . . . wealth (the supporte and upholder of gentrie and worldlie reputation) nobilitie or gentilitie is a vaine and contemptible tytle hear in England, and allwayes hath bene and of the contrarie, the degree of wealth is the degree of gentrie.

Later he rams home the point again:

Preserve youre estate if you will preserve your gentrie and nobilitie of blood, which is nothing els but a discent of riches.¹⁹

This realistic view, unclouded by sentimental antiquarianism, may serve as a useful corrective to the idolatry of “ancientry” found in so much contemporary writing. Sir John was proud of the antiquity of his name but it was the future which dominated his mind. The Lowther fortunes must be mended; the Lowther estates must be enlarged; at the same time his younger children must be provided for, and in his eyes this objective in no way clashed with the others. Sir John’s “prudent egotism” required no “martyrs” from among his own family; Lowther prosperity would be a team effort.²⁰

For Lowther’s sons, preparation began early. The details of Christopher’s and William’s adolescent training are cloudy, but Christopher spent some time at university and the Inner Temple, and both Christopher and William made early journeys abroad, probably as part of their apprenticeships in trade.²¹ Lowther determined that both his younger sons should play their part in the family revival by becoming successful merchants. Between 1630 and Sir John’s death in 1637 the trader brothers span a web of business ventures straddling Ireland, Cumberland, Yorkshire, the Biscay coast of France, the Canary Islands, Scandinavia and, most importantly, Germany. Their merchandise included salt, coal, Irish beef, hides and tallow, Irish wheat and pipe staves, Scotch herring caught in their own vessels, wool, cloth and wine. They had agents in Bristol, Dublin and other Irish seaports, in Hamburg and the Canaries, and their associates included Sir George Radcliffe and to a degree his master, Lord Deputy Wentworth in Dublin. Sir John proudly claimed in 1635 that his younger sons “that I made merchants and bought their fredomes” now employed fifty to sixty men in their coalmines, saltworks, shipping, clothweaving and dressing “to whome they pay dayly wages out of their industrie and my stock”, and paid about £500 a year in customs, “the one being under 24 years, the other 25”.²²

A scrutiny of Christopher’s letters and diaries would irretrievably damage the notion that trade was perceived as a demeaning occupation. He and his brother William were not sent off into trade because their father was too penurious to provide for them, or in order to rid the estate of a dangerous liability, leaving them to make their way independently. No matter whether Christopher was in Dublin or London, or William in Leeds or Hamburg, they were an integral part of a flourishing concern. The chief director of that concern was Sir John Lowther, and its headquarters was Lowther Hall or, in term, Sir John’s legal chamber at York. To him his sons regularly and respectfully reported. They took no decisions of significance without his consent. The gains they made by their exertions were his to use for the family’s welfare.²³ In return he provided them with advice, instructions and liquid capital, as did their mother and eldest brother. Sir John also used his influence with men like Wentworth and Radcliffe on behalf of the family ventures.

It may be suggested that Christopher and William were not “true” merchants, or at least very untypical – that they were gentlemen-adventurers rather than professionals, having a flutter in trade before settling down to respectable squirearchical pursuits. On the contrary, the tenor and tone of Christopher’s papers strongly suggest that he took great pride in his professionalism, was sensitive to any criticism of his expertise, and had

no taint of amateurism in his attitude or in his projects. Moreover, as lord of the manor of St Bees in his own right after his father's death, he still took an active part in commerce, owning ships, importing processed iron, and exporting salt, coal and iron ore. William's career in foreign trade continued after his brother's early death; he was active in Rotterdam and Leeds throughout the Civil War and Interregnum. Neither in their writings nor their careers is there anything to suggest that they found their mercantile status demeaning, nor that their father believed that he had sacrificed his sons' gentility for the sake of the family estates or his eldest son's advantage. Trade, prudently and closely followed, was a road to wealth, and wealth, as we have seen, was in Lowther's eyes the true foundation and maintenance of gentility.²⁴

While his sons were packhorses in the many Lowther ventures, Sir John himself was not idle. In the intervals of public life and legal practice in York he was a dedicated estate improver and expander. He claimed to have bettered his estate between 1617 and 1627 by "near £20,000", and this progress was maintained until his death in September 1637.²⁵ No doubt he purchased estates because "the degree of wealth is the degree of gentry", but in particular, he purchased land so that he could provide estates for his two younger sons. In May 1628, when he and his eldest son John were both knights of the shire for Westmorland, he bought Eggleston Abbey, North Yorkshire, together with Startforth and Arkengarthdale rectories, from Sir Henry Compton for £3,547. Then in 1630 he bought a half share of the manor of St Bees, Cumberland, which included the then mere fishing village of Whitehaven, for £2,450.²⁶ Both purchases were designed for his younger sons.

In 1636, a year before his death, Lowther reflected that he had £5,000 in hand which could yield £400 per annum at 8%, but his sons intended rather to double it in trade. If his sons were successful in their trading "we may spare £2,500 per annum for their advancements, which if employed at 8 per cent or in their trade may produce . . . at least . . . in nine years . . . £39,000". Over the coming eighteen years the "firm" might well accumulate £60,000 "though my forward young sonnes pretend to thinke to doe better", and Sir John complacently concludes by praising God "that hath sett us before all our neighbours in our ranck in these two countries".²⁷

In fact the death of Sir John in September 1637 and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642 set limits to these golden visions. Moreover, after Sir John's death there were three Lowther concerns rather than one, for the brothers acted independently of one another. This contravened their father's earnest advice, who in his last years had urged them to cooperate closely after his death, consulting their mother and brothers, abiding by the wishes of the majority. If they died without issue they should divide what he had left them among their siblings. Their "own gettings" they might dispose as they pleased.²⁸

Lowther's hopes of the family concern accumulating £60,000 in eighteen years may sound ambitious, but in their separate courses these three branches of the family far exceeded it later in the century. Certainly Sir John had lived to see his "house" raised to a greater prominence and prosperity than it had ever known before.²⁹ In this rise his younger sons had played a major part. The St Bees' estate had been purchased for Christopher who managed it for his father until he inherited it. Eggleston Abbey had been bought for William, but this decision was reversed when he insisted on marrying the daughter of the great Leeds merchant, William Busfield, who was a Lowther business associate during the 1630s.³⁰ The settlement of St Bees on Christopher, which created

the Whitehaven branch of the family, was to make Lowther's great grandson, James, a millionaire because of the vast coal deposits which lay beneath it.³¹ Meanwhile St Bees, by guaranteeing Christopher's status and security, made this trader son eligible for a good marriage, and in 1634 Sir John found the perfect match. The Lancaster family of Westmorland was confronted by the failure of the male line. Of the two Lancaster brothers the younger was childless and the elder had only two daughters. In 1634 Sir John signed a marriage treaty with the Lancasters which, even by seventeenth century standards, was notably unmarred by sentimentality. The girls were not yet of marriageable age, but Christopher was betrothed to the elder. If she died before the marriage he was to marry her sister; if he died before the nuptials his brother William would take his place.³²

Some time after Sir John's death Christopher married Frances Lancaster, and so became heir to the manors of Sockbridge and Hartsop with a scatter of other valuable properties worth £500 a year. If he had left no heir the manor of St Bees would have reverted to his elder brother, and the Lancaster properties to his wife's relatives. In the event Frances gave Christopher a son in 1642, gratefully but confusingly christened John, and the double inheritance was secure. Thus the trader of the 1630s became the squire of St Bees, a baronet in 1642, a royalist brigadier, governor of Whitehaven and of Cockermouth Castle for the duke of Newcastle. When he died in 1644 aged 33, Christopher left a two year old son of great potential wealth, who was destined to exploit that potential to the full before his death in 1706. Will. Lowther, denied Egglestone Abbey, later acquired a Yorkshire manor and founded the Swillington branch of the family from which the current dynasty of earls of Lonsdale descends.

Lowther made his last will in April 1637, five months before his death. He confirmed his gift of St Bees to Christopher, and £2,500 allotted to or perhaps invested with him, and bequeathed him a further £1,000. He also bequeathed £1,000 to William together with what remained of £3,000 invested with him, part of which had been lost in some failed speculation, 'though by reason of his obstinate disobediance in marrieing against my will he deserved not soe much'. His unmarried daughter was to receive £50 a year maintenance until marriage, and £1,000 at marriage or on reaching her majority, and a further £1,000 to be paid within one year of her marriage. His married daughter Agnes, already well provided for, received £400 to distribute among her children. Apart from various small legacies the remainder passed to his eldest son John, save for a hundred of his best ewes with pasture for them in Wensledale, which he bequeathed to his grandson John "to cherish the boy's thrift".³³

No doubt the patriarch of the Lowthers died disappointed that he could not live to help his sons accomplish still more; but he had accomplished wonders in his fifty-three years. During the 1630s he was much troubled by the problem of how to trust them with great possessions in his own lifetime, and yet to keep control of them. How could he rule them if he divided his estates amongst them? To filial affection he never dared trust. On the other hand, following Lowther tradition, he distrusted his eldest son, believing him avaricious and too much involved with his wife's relatives. He settled St Bees on Christopher before his death, reiterating the gift in his will, lest John might dispute Christopher's right, using his legal expertise to cheat him of it.³⁴ In fact, with the exception of Will.'s marriage, hardly a disaster, Lowther's plans were largely fulfilled.

The next generation of Lowther sons, both at Lowther Hall in Westmorland and at Swillington in Yorkshire, were not sacrificed to the estate's development or to provide for the eldest son. Sir Christopher of Whitehaven had no younger sons, but his wife was pregnant at his death and his last actions demonstrate his attitude clearly. Shortly before his death he drew up an elaborate settlement not only to protect his infant son's inheritance, but also to make provision for his unborn child. Money was set aside for the child's maintenance and, if a boy, for his education at Oxford and the Inns of Court.³⁵ The second Sir John Lowther of Lowther, created baronet 1639, survived until 1675, married twice and had two families. Twelve children survived to adulthood, including seven sons. The eldest is referred to as Colonel John Lowther of Hackthorp Hall (1628-67) to distinguish him from the other five seventeenth century John Lowthers. Sir John grew increasingly disenchanted with this eldest son, who twice married without his consent, first to Elizabeth Bellingham, a lady of inadequate fortune whose dowry was never fully paid, and then to Mary Withins, a gentlewoman of no fortune at all. This second marriage deeply displeased Sir John because, as he confided to his diary, no advantage of fortune or friendship was to be gained from it, but rather an additional burden on the estate. This persuaded him to disinherit his eldest son and settle his estates on his grandson, and to provide more generously for his other children, leaving Colonel John with only a "competent subsistence".³⁶

John Lowther of Hackthorpe, former army officer, a widower of thirty-eight, and a member of parliament for Appleby, might have been allowed, one would think, to choose a wife for himself. Not in his father's eyes, however, for Sir John had intended to employ the large dowry his widower heir could capture in providing portions for his own younger children. However, disinheriting the heir proved without significance, for John of Hackthorpe died eight years before his father. Nevertheless Sir John's preoccupation with his younger children survived. In 1671 the old man was pressuring his grandson, then aged only sixteen, to take a wife, under the threat of dividing the estates among his younger sons.³⁷ When he died in 1675 with his grandson safely married to Catherine Thynne, who brought a dowry of £5,000, his will left ample provision for his unmarried daughters and for his younger sons.

Sir John's second son, Richard, had pursued a military career in Ireland and had received substantial financial support from his father. Now he received the manor of Maulds Meaburn in Westmorland, two granges and £1,000 in cash. As a result he was enabled to found a cadet branch of the family. Member of parliament for Appleby in 1689 and a country squire, he married an East Yorkshire heiress, Barbara Pricket of Wressel Castle. (Richard's eldest son, Robert, became Governor of the Barbados, was frequently M.P. for Westmorland, and Storekeeper of the Tower. Robert's eldest son, James, between 1755 and 1756 inherited virtually all the Lowther estates in Cumberland and Westmorland, as three older branches died out, and later became first earl of Lonsdale.)

Sir John's other sons by his first marriage entered business. His third son, Christopher, was apprenticed to a Turkey merchant, before becoming a merchant in his own right with his father's generous assistance, but remained unmarried. At his death in 1671 his father gloomily calculated that Christopher's commercial career had cost him £5,000.³⁸ His fourth son, Hugh, proved a prodigal. Apprenticed to a London merchant at a cost of £300 premium on a bond of £1,000, he absconded, married without his father's

consent, escaped abroad to Boston, was captured by the French and died of his privations after repatriation.³⁹

Sir John also had three sons by his second wife, Elizabeth Leigh. The eldest, Ralph, became a Yorkshire squire through his widowed mother's purchase of the manor of Ackworth. The second son, William, was sent to Queen's College, Oxford, then to the Inns of Court, and became a barrister. His father had sufficiently provided for him so that he was able to marry the daughter of Sir William Rawlinson, a commissioner of the Great Seal. The youngest, Robert, originally apprenticed to an Exeter merchant, subsequently went to Amsterdam in the service of a London merchant, but when he came into an inheritance from his father seems to have retired from commerce to England and as a country gentleman was M.P. for Westmorland in 1705-8.⁴⁰ Sir John also left an income of £100 per year for his grandson William, the posthumous child of his disobedient son's unwelcome second marriage, who was M.P. for Carlisle at his death in 1694. Thus Sir John Lowther's actions, and particularly the several wills he drew up between 1649 and 1675, all demonstrate a very strong sense of responsibility toward his younger sons, all of whom were launched into the world with substantial backing, and those who survived received substantial legacies.⁴¹

Sir John's youngest brother, the first Sir William of Swillington (1612-87) established his second son as rector of Swillington, and paid him his portion in his own lifetime. His third son, John, who appears to have predeceased his father, followed a military career, rising at least to the rank of major. While little is known of him, he must have received some financial backing from his father to attain that rank. His fourth son, George, was launched on a commercial career and was a merchant in Holland in the 1670s, but predeceased his father. The remainder of Sir William's children were girls of whom at least six were enabled to marry.

Though affluent, the first Sir William of Swillington had only a fraction of the resources of his wealthy brother at Lowther, and his concern for his numerous brood, of whom at least eleven achieved adulthood, must have placed a heavy burden on his eldest son, the second Sir William Lowther (1639-1705). The latter struggling with a large family of his own, did not inherit the estate until 1687. Nevertheless, he launched his seven younger children into either careers or marriage. At least two sons, who were originally apprenticed to commerce with premiums as high as £150, were allowed to change their careers to that of soldiering, and a third son went directly into the army; two of these sons appear to have lost their lives in the service of William III. Richard was not only apprenticed to a London linen draper trading in Holland, but had spent the previous year in a Dutch boarding school the better to equip him to serve his master. His subsequent career is obscure but he became sufficiently affluent to marry twice and well, successively the daughters of Sir Christopher Wandesford and Sir John Fenwick. Sir William's fifth son, Christopher, was apprenticed to an English merchant in Seville, who was an agent of the wealthy London merchant Sir Joseph Herne. The premium was £200 and Christopher had an allowance of £20 per annum with a stern warning that he must not imperil the bond of £1,000 his father had entered for his good behaviour for that was the whole of his "child portion". When his master's firm went bankrupt Christopher returned home, ran his father's Yorkshire farms and finally inherited all the unentailed properties not already in the hands of his older brothers, William and

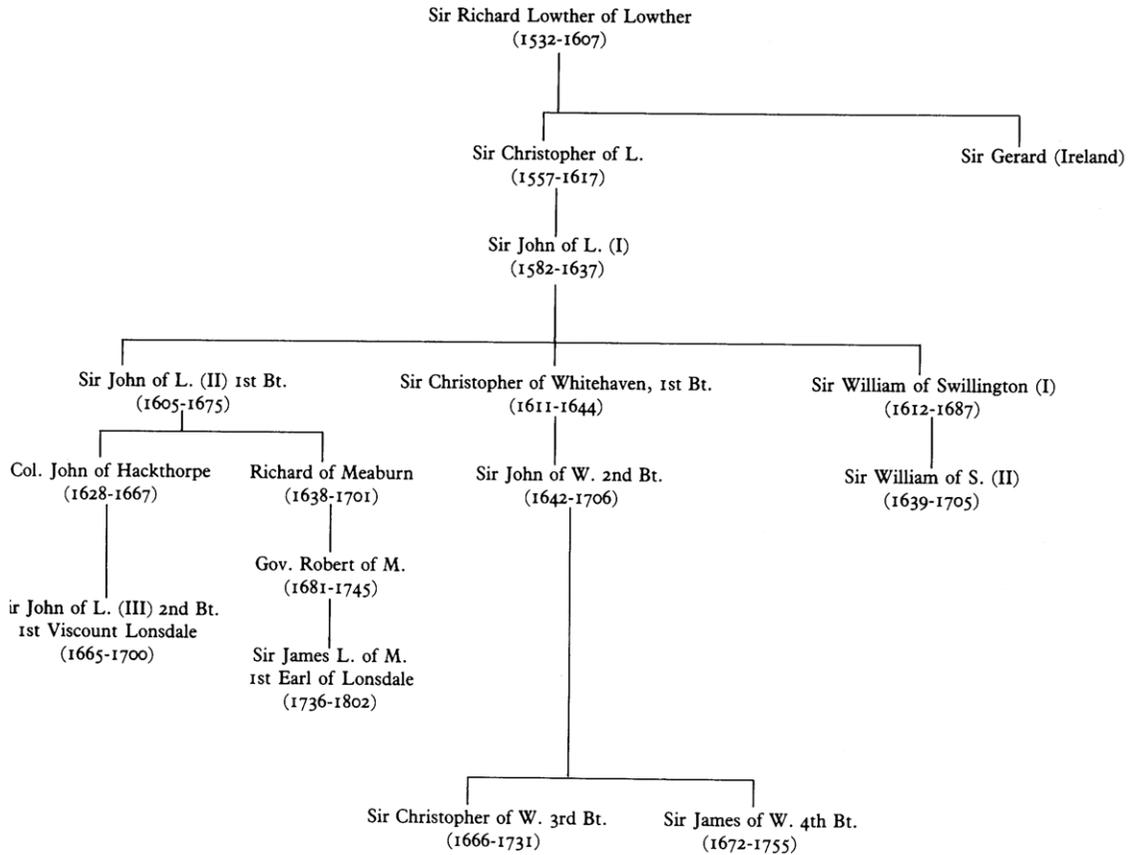
Richard. The second Sir William's youngest son, Gerard, predeceased his father at the age of twenty-three, but had already been launched on a legal career.⁴²

Nothing could more clearly illustrate the second Sir William Lowther's attitude to his younger children than the loathing and hatred which he felt for his eldest son, the future Sir William Lowther the third, who was ambitious enough to marry into the peerage. While his wife, Annabelle, daughter of Lord Maynard, brought a large dowry, the marriage was deeply resented though vainly opposed by his father because of the huge jointure with which the estate would be burdened. This expensive folly would prevent him from providing as generously as he wished for his younger children, and his son's younger children would suffer in the future. Had Sir William had the power to disinherit his eldest son, he would gladly have done so to prevent a dangerously expensive alliance which he saw as certain to imperil the welfare of the family as a whole.⁴³

Over several generations of different branches of the Lowther clan we can discern a consistent attitude and policy toward younger sons. From the patriarchal Sir John Lowther the first, who died in 1637, to his grandson the second Sir William Lowther of Swillington, who died in 1705, each father showed the same determination to establish all his sons in the world, and also to launch his daughters in the only available career of marriage. Far from sacrificing younger sons to eldest sons, or to the long-term interest of the estate, the Lowther fathers were inclined to be suspicious and even harsh in their relations with their eldest sons. Two were disinherited, and a third would have been had this weapon been available.⁴⁴ The estates controlled by Lowther fathers were burdened by the provision of portions or dowries for all children. All the Lowther fathers insisted on obedience and respect from their children although they did not always receive it, but those who showed a due degree of filial piety, and who were prepared to behave responsibly and thriftily, could expect to be sustained and encouraged. Even backsliders who showed repentance and amendment were usually restored to favour.

Were the Lowthers peculiarly atypical? Were they so unusual in their attitudes and practices as to constitute a bad case study? When Colin Phillips examined the gentry families of Cumberland and Westmorland between 1600 and 1665 he found none that could match the Lowthers in the provision made for sons and daughters. For some 132 younger sons identified for the year 1642, he was unable to ascertain the occupations of more than half, with slightly more success for the 165 younger sons of 1665. There were possibly a large number of sons moping at home in genteel indigence until the Civil War came along to provide an outlet for their frustrated energies. Nevertheless 41% of the sons of 1642 and 1665 were launched on careers by their provident fathers, and a further 8% of the 1642 group were found "temporary" provision in the form of annuities or leases. Several, like Christopher Lowther of Whitehaven, set up cadet branches of gentry families.⁴⁵ There can be little doubt that the impact of the Civil War, with deaths, dispersal of assets, confiscations and fines, bore heavily on the overwhelmingly royalist gentry of the northwest. Many fathers were unable to provide for their sons and daughters in the way they had originally planned. However, the fact that they could not hope to match the munificence of the first Sir John Lowther or his sons does not mean they did not share the Lowther family's attitudes and aspirations. Moreover, there is a wealth of evidence from other regions which suggests that the Lowther practices and attitudes were shared by large numbers of seventeenth century gentlemen.⁴⁶ While the experience

THE LOWTHER FAMILY OF CUMBERLAND AND WESTMORLAND, 1532-1755



of younger sons varied from great generosity to stark neglect, many fathers and eldest brothers laboured diligently and devotedly to secure the futures of their younger sons and brothers.

Was parental affection really less strong in the Stuart age than today? It was certainly more all embracing, with parents responsible not only for their children's rearing and education, but also for their moral welfare, their marriages, their status in the world, their capacity to hold their own, or even rise on the ladder of degree. The success of younger sons in finding and keeping their rung on the ladder, their rate of ascent or descent, would not only be influenced by their luck and their own capabilities, but also by the weight of their fathers' purse and the calls to be made on it. As the first Sir John Lowther wrote: "the degree of wealth is the degree of gentry". We must beware of accepting seventeenth century literary stereotypes, penned by disgruntled and articulate individual sufferers, as faithfully depicting the experience of their group as a whole.

Notes and References

- ¹ See Thomas Wilson's complaint in *The State of England An. Dom. 1600* (ed.) F. J. Fisher, Camden Soc., 2nd ser., 52 (1936), 24; John Earle, *Microcosmography*, (ed.) P. Bliss and S. T. Irwin (1897), 22-4. For an analysis of this literature see Joan Thirsk, "Younger Sons in the Seventeenth Century", *History*, 4 (1969), 359-76.
- ² Wilson, *op. cit.*, 24.
- ³ Thirsk, *op. cit.*, 360, 376.
- ⁴ R. H. Tawney, "The Rise of the Gentry, 1558-1640", *Econ. History Review*, 11 (1941), 3.
- ⁵ Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1640* (Oxford, 1965), 39.
- ⁶ C. V. Wedgewood, letter to *Encounter*, 11 (Nov. 1958), 81.
- ⁷ Edmund Bolton, *The City's Advocate in this Case or Question of Honor and Armes: Whether Apprenticeship Extinguisheth Gentry?* (1629), 8-9, 26-7; Ben-Arod Gad, pseud., *The Wandering Jew* (1652); Sir John Doddridge, *Honour's Pedigree* (1652), 147-50; see also Steven R. Smith, "Social and Geographical Origins of the London Apprentices, 1630-1660", *Guildhall Miscellany*, 4 (1973), 195-206.
- ⁸ *Dictionary of National Biography*.
- ⁹ For the medieval Lowthers see C. M. Lowther-Bouch, "The Origins and Early Pedigree of the Lowther Family", CW2, xlviii, 114-24.
- ¹⁰ See the appended much simplified family tree.
- ¹¹ E. T. Bewley, "Some Notes on the Lowthers Who Held Judicial Office in Ireland in the Seventeenth Century", CW2, ii, 1-28.
- ¹² Christopher Lowther was knighted by James I when, with other northern gentlemen, he met the new monarch at the Border in 1603.
- ¹³ Cumbria R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lons/L, A1/1, fos. 336 and 344v.
- ¹⁴ *Loc. cit.* As we shall see this concern for his siblings was no empty boast.
- ¹⁵ Lowther and Long Marton. Richard was a barrister of Gray's Inn, and William, Clerk of the Warrants of Common Pleas in Ireland. An eighth bastard son, Sir Gerard, often confused with his uncle, rose to be Chief Justice of the Common Pleas in Ireland, *D.N.B.*, xxxiv, 223; Bewley, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
- ¹⁶ Significantly this purchase was made possible by his nephew, the second Sir John Lowther of Lowther and current head of the clan joining him in the purchase, the Lowther of Lowther interest being subsequently bought out by the Lowthers of Marske.
- ¹⁷ See various Lowther estate books D/Lons/L, A1/1, A1/4, A1/6 parts of which have been splendidly edited by C. B. Phillips in *Lowther Family Estate Books*, Surtees Society 191 (1979).
- ¹⁸ "Reasons to satisfy my brother Robert . . . that I have showed more kindness to him and all my brothers than well wishes only", n.d., D/Lons/L, A/6, fo. 38 ff; for Will's apprenticeship premium see A1/1, fo. 370. For his self-denying settlement of his father's estate, see Sir John Lowther's "Great Book" fo. 25r (C. B. Phillips (ed.), *Lowther Family Estate Books*, 12).
- ¹⁹ D/Lons/L, A1/1, fos. 35r, 35v; (Phillips, *op. cit.*, 200-1).

- ²⁰ Significantly he observes "you all being all as one to me" (my emphasis), D/Lons/L, A1/1 fo. 367.
- ²¹ *Op. cit.*, fo. 367. William was in Hamburg at least as early as 1632, D. R. Hainsworth (ed.) *Commercial Papers of Sir Christopher Lowther 1611-1644*, Surtees Society, 189 (1977) 55.
- ²² D/Lons/L, A1/1, fos. 360-1, (Phillips (ed.) *Lowther Family Estate Books*, 230). For Christopher Lowther's business career see D. R. Hainsworth, "Christopher Lowther's Canary Adventure: A Merchant Venturer in Dublin, 1632-3", *Irish Economic and Social History*, 2 (1975), 22-34 and *Commercial Papers of Sir Christopher Lowther*.
- ²³ Thus Christopher to his father: ". . . while I live I will accompte noethinge I shall have to be myne but yours, to dispose of at your pleasure", D/Lons/L, A1/1, fo. 369.
- ²⁴ For Christopher's last years at Whitehaven see his letter book in Hainsworth (ed.) *Commercial Papers of Sir Christopher Lowther*, 65-82; William's letter book for the 1640s and 1650s is in the Lowther of Swillington Papers, C.R.O. (Clwyd), Ruthin. For William see also C. M. Lowther Bouch, "Lowther of Swillington from its Origin until 1788", CW2, xlii, 67-102.
- ²⁵ Lowther's extensive estate management has been closely analysed in C. B. Phillips, "The Gentry in Cumberland and Westmorland 1600-1665", unpublished Ph.D thesis, Lancaster (1973), chap. 6 passim. and fully documented in his edition of the *Lowther Family Estate Books*.
- ²⁶ D/Lons/L, A1/4, fos. 67, 73 (Phillips (ed.) *Lowther Family Estate Books*, 27, 35).
- ²⁷ D/Lons/L, A1/1 fo. 93.
- ²⁸ D/Lons/L, A1/1, fo. 370.
- ²⁹ This did not pass unnoticed. John and Christopher had expensive baronetcies put on them in 1639 and 1642.
- ³⁰ D/Lons/L, A1/4, fo. 93.
- ³¹ See especially C. V. Beckett, *Coal and Tobacco: the Lowthers and the Economic Development of West Cumberland 1660-1760* (Cambridge, 1981) and D. R. Hainsworth (ed.), *The Correspondence of Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven 1693-1698: A Provincial Community in Wartime*, British Academy: Documents in Social and Economic History, 2nd ser., 7 (1983).
- ³² William's disobedient marriage with Miss Busfield was in breach of this agreement and might have imperilled it. See "An agreement for a marriage betwixt one of the Lowthers and a female of Sockbridge Hall, 17 Feb. 1633/4", D/Lons/W, Sir Christopher Lowther.
- ³³ The future Colonel John Lowther of Hackthorpe Hall (1628-1667) who was to predecease his father. For Lowther's will see D/Lons/L.
- ³⁴ "Considerations before I resolve to settle my lands upon my son in marriage or otherwise", D/Lons/L, A1/1, fos. 368-70; also 49, 366.
- ³⁵ It was a girl, Frances, who was to marry Richard Lamplugh of Ribton. For settlement, Hainsworth, *Commercial Papers*, 228-232.
- ³⁶ D/Lons/L, A1/4a, fol 237v.
- ³⁷ Part of the pressure was applied by John's Oxford tutor; Thomas Barlow, Provost of Queen's College to Lowther, D/Lons/L, Correspondence, CL 28.
- ³⁸ D/Lons/L, A1/1, fo. 284v.
- ³⁹ D/Lons/L, A1/4a, fos. 232-3.
- ⁴⁰ For interesting letters concerning his experiences in Amsterdam see "Letters of Lady Lowther of Ackworth 1682-1692" (transcripts in the library of Muncaster Castle). I am indebted to the late Sir William Pennington-Ramsden for the opportunity to consult these letters at Muncaster, and for subsequently permitting a photocopy to be lodged in Cumbria R.O. (Carlisle).
- ⁴¹ For Lowther's will C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lons/L, Wills, Settlements and Inventories, 1565-1810.
- ⁴² For Lowther of Swillington correspondence, Clwyd R.O., Ruthin, first Sir William DD/L/125; second Sir William DD/L/126.
- ⁴³ See his correspondence, Clwyd R.O., DD/L/126.
- ⁴⁴ In 1705 Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven, possessed of unentailed estates, disinherited his eldest son, a compulsive drinker and gambler, in favour of his thrifty younger son, James, D/Lons/W, Wills and see also Hainsworth, *Correspondence of Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven*, various.
- ⁴⁵ Phillips, *op. cit.*, ch. 4.
- ⁴⁶ D. R. Hainsworth, "Manor House to Counting House: the Gentry Younger Son in Trade in the Seventeenth Century" in J. F. McGregor and N. Wright (eds.) *European History and Its Historians* (Adelaide, 1977), 66-74.