

Sir Thomas St Leger, c 1439–83: the rise and fall of a royal servant during the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III

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Thomas St Leger was virtually an exact contemporary of King Edward IV. Quite likely he had already become attached to the House of York before 1461 and evidence suggests that he had fought at Towton in March of that year. Certainly from the beginning of Edward's reign he served in the royal household and held a variety of official posts in the south-east and south-west of England. Grants of lands and fees came his way from the Crown. In Surrey alone he was a sometime commissioner of array, a Justice of the Peace, joint sheriff of Surrey and Sussex and a knight of the shire in the parliaments of 1467–8 and 1472–5 (and possibly that of 1483). St Leger held family lands in Kent and acquired properties in Surrey and the South-West. In Surrey he had interests in such places as Chaldon, Claygate-in-Ash, Field Place in Compton, Guildford and Kennington. There was a military/diplomatic side to his career. In 1475, when still only an 'esquire of the body' (he was not to be knighted until some three years later) Thomas St Leger took part in the royal expedition to France, where he played a part in the negotiations which led to the Treaty of Picquigny. He also served for a time as constable of Rochester and Farnham castles.

In 1472 he married the king's sister, Anne, Duchess of Exeter, an event which was a cause célèbre. Unsurprisingly his career brought close relationships with several men of influence and substance from the aristocracy to the gentry: with the important family of Bouchier, of whom Thomas was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1454–86; with Edward IV's most intimate friend, William Lord Hastings; and with such local notabilities as Sir George Browne and Nicholas Gaynesford. In the political confusion and in-fighting that followed the unexpected death of Edward on 9 April 1483, St Leger remained loyal to the late king's family. His opposition to Richard Duke of Gloucester's coup to seize the throne eventually took practical shape in his involvement in the risings of October to November 1483, commonly known as 'Buckingham's Rebellion', first in Surrey and then in the South-West, where he was captured and executed at Exeter.

Sir Thomas St Leger founded a chantry in St George's Chapel at Windsor where he and his wife, the Duchess Anne, who predeceased him, are buried.

The family of St Leger appears to have become established in Kent by the mid-14th century for, in 1346, Ralph St Leger was recorded as holding one fee in Ulcombe of the archbishop of Canterbury. Furthermore at an unstated time in the reign of Edward III, John and Thomas St Leger, as heirs of Bartholomew, were said to be holding the manors of 'Maplehurst' and 'Pendecourt'.¹ In 1426, 1429 and 1430, John St Leger was patron of the collegiate church of Ulcombe.² This John could well have been the father of Thomas and other children by his wife Margery (Dannet) of Syleham, Suffolk.³ John was dead by 1442, when his widow was licensed to hold lands in Rainham, Kent, with successive remainders to James, Ralph, Thomas and Bartholomew.⁴

Thomas St Leger was born about 1439 and so was almost the contemporary of his future patron and brother-in-law, King Edward IV (b 1442).⁵ Indeed it is quite likely that St Leger

¹ The name occurs variously as 'Salinger', 'Seintleger', 'St Leger', *Inquisitions* 1904, 39; Cayley & Bayley 1828, 158, no 46.

² Jacob 1943–7, 1, 231, 257, 265. The family still held the patronage of Ulcombe in 1476 and 1479, when presentations were made on behalf of Ralph St Leger, a minor, son of Ralph (du Boulay 1957, 326, 335).

³ *Visitation of Kent* 1906, 2, 69; Wedgwood & Holt 1936, 736.

⁴ *CalPR*, 1441–6, 75.

⁵ As a witness to the ages of Edward, son of Sir William Hastings, and Mary, daughter of Anne Lady Hungerford, on 11 June 1479, Sir Thomas St Leger, knight, was said to have been 40 years of age or more (Twemlow 1955, 13, pt 2, 690).

fought against the Lancastrians in the decisive battle at Towton on 29 March 1461, since the patent issued on 25 February 1462, granting him lands in Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire, specifically stated that it was in recognition 'for service in battle'.⁶ In fact, an earlier reward for his military service could well have been his appointment (then as a 'king's servant') for life on 22 July 1461 as controller, changer, and assayer of the Mint and of gold and silver coinage, at a fee of 40 marks (£26 13s 4d).⁷ In this move it is possible to see the influence of Henry Bourchier, Earl of Essex, Treasurer of England, and the king's uncle by marriage. Furthermore, this contact with Henry Bourchier could possibly have extended to his brother, Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury since 1454, on the grounds that the St Leger family held Ulcombe of the archbishops. If these suppositions are correct, then his links with the Bourchiers could well be the key to his early connections with the king. Another probable example of the influence of the Bourchier family was the nomination of Thomas St Leger 'esquire' on 3 December 1461 (but back-dated to the previous Michaelmas) as joint farmer for seven years of the subsidy and alnage of cloths in Somerset and Dorset.⁸ Nine days later, the sheriffs of London and Middlesex were ordered to pay St Leger, now a 'king's serjeant', £26 13s 4d annually, together with any arrears, as controller of the Mint. As an additional privilege he was to be allowed to carry out his duties by deputy.⁹

From this point St Leger made steady progress in his career. Appointments came thick and fast: in March and May 1462 his term as alnager in Somerset and Dorset was extended to ten years and he was also given a similar post in Wiltshire and Salisbury.¹⁰ Other responsibilities reflected his increasing importance and also carried with them potential for financial reward. On 12 August, for example, he obtained the keepership of Chestonwood, Kent; on 24 September – by which time St Leger had become an 'esquire of the body' – he was granted custody of the lands and wardship of a minor, Thomas Langham; on 24 January 1463 the keepership of the royal park of Guildford fell into his hands; on 20 February he was made custodian of Oldbury manor, Gloucestershire, on account of the incapacity of John Thorp (the grant was without payment, provided that he maintained his charge); and on 26 February 1463 he was appointed searcher of Bristol and adjacent ports during pleasure.¹¹ In the following year, on 2 July 1464, St Leger was granted 2d a day from the manor and hundred of Middleton, Kent, as keeper of Chestonwood. Furthermore, during the financial year 1463–4 he received 40s as an 'esquire of the household'.¹²

That Thomas now stood well in the king's favour – and indeed almost certainly enjoyed his friendship – is suggested first by his exemption from the Act of Resumption of 1464, and secondly by the pardon he was allowed in January 1465 for having struck Stephen Christmas esquire, one of the marshals of the king's hall within the palace of Westminster, an action which normally would have been punished by the loss of the culprit's right hand.¹³ Officially the pardon was granted in consideration of St Leger's good service to the king and his late father (which suggests that his links with the House of York went back before 1461). Yet it seems reasonable to suggest that more than 'good service' lay behind Edward IV's clemency

⁶ *CalPR*, 1461–7, 77. The manors of Colville, Seagrave and Willingham, Cambridgeshire, had been forfeited by Finderne, who had fought for the Lancastrians at Towton in 1461 and at Hexham in 1464, where he had been captured and executed (Roskell 1965, 356; Goodman 1981, 64).

⁷ *CalPR*, 1461–7, 49.

⁸ *CalFR*, 1461–71, 26. These officials paid £100 a year, with an increment of 3s 4d, which indicates that the post could be expected to yield a good return.

⁹ *CalCR*, 1461–8, 34–5.

¹⁰ *CalFR*, 1461–71, 73.

¹¹ *CalPR*, 1461–71, 208, 210, 213, 220; *CalFR*, 1461–71, 79. He was paid a fee of £16 13s 4d as keeper of Guildford Park (Horrox & Hammond 1979–83, 3, 195).

¹² *CalPR*, 1461–71, 334; TNA: E 101/411/13, f 36v.

¹³ Strachey *et al* 1767–77, V, 534b. St Leger had been tried and sentenced by John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, as steward of the household (*CalPR*, 1461–71, 380; Myers 1959, 257).

– fairly close friendship, in fact. Furthermore it would be interesting to know what had occasioned this fracas between these two royal servants. More marks of royal favour continued to come St Leger's way: on 20 April 1465 he was given for life the manor of Kennington, Surrey, at 20 marks a year, and on 15 July that of Claygate-in-Ash, also in that county, at 10 marks a year.¹⁴ Twelve months later, on 2 July 1466, the earlier gift of the manors in Cambridgeshire forfeited by Sir Thomas Ffinderne was re-issued to St Leger to include his heirs male; and on 15 July he and Thomas Herbert the elder were awarded the joint custody of Thomas, son of Simon Melbourne esquire, during his minority.¹⁵

He was in post as controller of the Mint under William, Lord Hastings, as Master, when an important recoinage was undertaken in 1464–5. In February 1467 his tenure for life of the controllership was renewed.¹⁶ His counter rolls as controller have survived for the financial years Michaelmas 1468 to Michaelmas 1479.¹⁷ Meantime he had been paid 40s for his service as an esquire of the hall between Christmas 1466 and Pentecost 1467.¹⁸

Shortly after St Leger had completed this spell of service in the royal household he was elected, on 20 May, as senior knight of the shire for Surrey to the parliament which opened at Westminster on 3 June.¹⁹ This assembly met against a background of increasing friction between the king and the Nevilles. It was in this parliament that Edward IV announced that he intended 'to live of his own' – in other words, to manage without asking for parliamentary taxation. Significantly, the Speaker, a one-time Lancastrian but now firmly loyal to Edward IV, was Sir John Say who, like St Leger, had connections with the Bourchier family, and indirectly with the Queen's family, the Woodvilles.²⁰

One of the main decisions of this parliament was to pass another Act of Resumption, from the operation of which (unsurprisingly) St Leger was exempted.²¹ During the lifetime of the parliament he was appointed, on 15 February 1468, a Justice of the Peace for Surrey.²² The day before the dissolution, on 6 June 1468, St Leger and his fellow parliamentary knight, John Gaynesford esquire, were nominated with the earl of Arundel to distribute the customary tax allowances for their shire.²³ Early in 1469 he and John Langley were given for life the custody of the royal manor and park of Chiltern Langley, Hertfordshire; and in the following December he and Nicholas Gaynesford esquire were granted the wardship and marriage of one Robert White.²⁴

Edward IV survived the attempted coup by the earl of Warwick in 1469, but on 2 October 1470 he was forced to flee abroad.²⁵ About a fortnight before, St Leger and other loyalists had tried to organise resistance against Warwick. At a meeting of the 'Twenty-Four' at Salisbury on 21 September two letters were read out, one from Warwick and Clarence demanding forty armed men, and another from St Leger ordering opposition to the rebel lords.²⁶ It is not known whether St Leger accompanied the king and other Yorkists into exile, but it has been suggested that he was left behind 'stranded' in England.²⁷ At all events his

¹⁴ *CalPR*, 1461–7, 435; *CalFR*, 1461–71, 159.

¹⁵ *CalPR*, 1461–7, 521, 523.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 551. For the recoinage see Ross 1974, 377–8.

¹⁷ TNA: E 101/298/32.

¹⁸ TNA: E 101/412/2, f 36v (Account of Sir John Fogge, steward of the household).

¹⁹ TNA: C 219/17/1, pt 2, 103; *Official Return* 1879, 1, 358.

²⁰ For a summary of the work of this parliament, see Roskell 1965, 280–1. Professor Roskell wrote a full biography of Say (Roskell 1959a).

²¹ Strachey *et al* 1767–77, 5, 586, 613.

²² *CalPR*, 1467–77, 632.

²³ *CalFR*, 1461–71, 230, 238.

²⁴ *CalPR*, 1467–77, 136, 182.

²⁵ Details in Ross 1974, 153 and n.l.

²⁶ Benson & Hatcher 1822–43, 175; HMC, *Various Collections*, 4 (1907), *Report 55: Records of Salisbury Corporation*, 207–8.

²⁷ Morgan 1973, 10, citing HMC, *Various Collections*, 4, 207–8.

clear support for the king must have accounted for his removal from the Surrey bench of justices on 15 December 1470.²⁸

With Edward IV's recovery of the throne and the re-establishment of his authority in 1471, there came, too, a revival of St Leger's fortunes. There is no evidence that he fought at either Barnet (14 April) or Tewkesbury (4 May). However, after the defeat of Fauconberg's rising in Kent shortly after Tewkesbury, the king left dependable men in strong points in the country, including Sir John Scott at Sandwich and Thomas St Leger at Rochester.²⁹ Quite possibly, therefore, St Leger, as constable of Rochester, had remained there throughout the campaigns of Barnet and Tewkesbury. Interestingly enough, on 29 May 1471, he was paid £85 as constable of Rochester and for the cost of 40 knights and 60 foot soldiers for thirty days.³⁰ This could suggest either that the garrison of Rochester had been reinforced, or that St Leger had an active force under his command. In the meantime – and three days before the battle of Barnet – he had been appointed sheriff of Surrey and Sussex (11 April), with the responsibility of accounting from the previous Michaelmas. He was to serve until 9 November 1471.³¹ A month earlier, on 4 October, St Leger had been made constable of Farnham Castle by William Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester. This was an interesting act, since Waynflete had recently supported the restoration of the Lancastrian Henry VI the year before. The point could be raised as to whether the king had put pressure on the bishop to nominate St Leger to the post, or whether Waynflete had made the appointment as an act of appeasement.³² His responsibilities at Farnham were quite remunerative, for on 16 November payment of £26 13s 4d, was ordered to be paid to St Leger, and later he was given a further sum of £36 3s 4d.³³

Personal connections and involvement at this time underline the fact that Thomas St Leger was very much at the centre of the Yorkist establishment. For example, on 20 December 1471, he occurs as a co-feoffee with John Bouchier, Lord Berners (brother of the archbishop of Canterbury) and Thomas Bouchier esquire in a transaction about land in Croydon and Coulsdon.³⁴ It is equally indicative that, with three other 'squires of the body' and five knights, he was detailed to attend the royal chamber for a stint of eight weeks from 26 December 1471 to 20 February 1472.³⁵ It has been shown that Edward IV employed members of his household on public commissions as a means of providing both a link between court and country and intelligence of affairs beyond the capital. St Leger was one of such men. Typical was his appointment on 7 March 1472, with Nicholas Gaynesford (also a member of the royal household) to a commission of array in Surrey, and his restoration to the bench in the same shire on 12 May.³⁶

For the second time, Thomas St Leger was returned to the Commons for Surrey, when he was elected at Guildford with Thomas Bouchier esquire on 30 September 1472. On this occasion his name was given second in the return, no doubt because Bouchier was considered the more established figure. The parliament, which had been summoned essentially to provide for a war against France, met at Westminster on 6 October. With prorogations, it was to last

²⁸ *CalPR*, 1467–77, 632.

²⁹ Scofield 1923, 2, 2.

³⁰ TNA: E 403/844, m 4; E 405/53, m 2.

³¹ *CalFR*, 1471–85, nos 41, 79. On Friday 25 Oct 1471, Thomas St Leger 'esquire' paid £8 into the Exchequer as sheriff of Surrey and Sussex (TNA: E 401/906).

³² Manning & Bray 1804–14, 3, 136; Thompson 1960, 89. It was Waynflete who led his friend, Henry VI, out of captivity from the Tower of London on 3 October 1470 (Wolffe 1981, 338).

³³ *CalCR*, 1468–76, no 693; *CalPR*, 1467–77, 297; Horrox & Hammond 1979–83, 3, 195.

³⁴ *CalCR*, 1468–76, no 994.

³⁵ Myers 1959, 199.

³⁶ *CalPR*, 1467–77, 351, 632; 1476–85, 574. On Edward's use of his household, see Ross 1974, 327. Nicholas Gaynesford of Carshalton, a lawyer, and 'household man' was five times elected to the Commons: Bletchingley, 1453; Surrey, 1460; Guildford, 1472; Southwark, 1478, and Surrey in 1491. His nephew, John, had sat with St Leger in 1467. For Nicholas, see Wedgwood & Holt 1936, 367–8, and for fuller coverage, Driver 1983, 2, 338–50.

until 14 March 1475 – the longest assembly before the Reformation Parliament of 1529–36.³⁷ Shortly after the first session opened, St Leger was granted a pardon on 20 October as ‘one of the squires of the body, alias controller of the Mint and assayer of gold and silver coins and searcher in Bristol’.³⁸ In the third session (6 October–13 December 1473) he was again among those privileged, with others of the royal household, to be exempted from the provisions of the Act of Resumption.³⁹ Earlier, on 18 August 1473, St Leger had been included in a commission to look into unpaid monies due to the Crown from Surrey; and on 22 November he was ordered, with the sheriff of Devon and other gentry, to arrest the abbot and three monks of St Mary’s Abbey, Buckland.⁴⁰

It was about this point that circumstances of his private life probably caused a shift of interest from London and the South-East to the South-West.

Thomas St Leger must have been about 30 years of age when he became the lover of the king’s sister Anne (born 1439), wife of Henry Holland, Duke of Exeter (born 1430). The latter suffered attainder in 1461, and in 1464 his wife apparently obtained powers ‘as a woman soule [=sole]’ to hold the lands of her husband. Exeter’s estates were widespread, but many were in the West Country, at Lydford and Blagdon (Somerset), and Bovey Tracy, Holsworthy, South Molton, Combe Martin, and Torrington (Devon).⁴¹ Some years later, in November 1472, Anne was allowed to divorce the duke to marry St Leger.⁴² Not only must this event have been a material factor in giving St Leger a foothold in the South-West, but it would have strengthened the government’s influence there through one of its most trusted servants.

There is good evidence to indicate that St Leger became directly involved in local matters. For example, between 1473 and 1477 he and the Stonor family had differences over boundary and fishing rights at Fleet Demarell in Devon. In this dispute Thomas St Leger seems to have taken a conciliatory attitude towards his adversary.⁴³ In October 1473 St Leger was a co-founder with Sir Maurice Berkeley and Sir John Parr, both ‘knights of the body’, of a perpetual chantry in St Laurence’s Church, Alton, Hampshire.⁴⁴ On 1 February 1474 St Leger was appointed a Justice of the Peace in Devon – a good example of Edward IV’s policy of slotting his loyal servants and officials into positions of local influence in the South-West. Initially St Leger only served on the Devonshire bench until 2 September but, after his re-appointment on 10 November 1475, he was to serve until his death.⁴⁵ In the meantime he had been pardoned for any offences he had committed during his recent stint as sheriff of Surrey and Sussex – a routine precaution no doubt.⁴⁶ Three further commissions underline his interests in the West Country: on 20 July 1474 St Leger was included in an enquiry into the escapes of felons in Devon and Somerset; on 6 August he was a member of a panel, headed by the Duke of Clarence, to issue proclamations in the principal towns of Cornwall to arrest the notorious troublemaker Henry Bodrugan and his followers; and on 28 November he himself headed a body to arrest all masters, sailors, and pirates of Fowey, Bodinnick and

³⁷ TNA: C 219/17/2, pt 2, 109. The election was conducted by the sheriff, John Gaynesford esquire, with 22 electors, headed by George Browne and Nicholas Gaynesford. Browne himself sat for Guildford in the 1472–5 parliament. His background had been Lancastrian, but he changed to become a firm Yorkist supporter and knight of the body to Edward IV (Ross 1981, 104–5).

³⁸ TNA: C 67/49, m 16.

³⁹ Strachey 1767–77, 6, 83.

⁴⁰ *CalPR*, 1467–77, 405, 408.

⁴¹ Cokayne *et al* 1910–59, 5, 214–16; Ramsey 1892, 2, 415.

⁴² ‘The 12 of November [1472] the lady Anne, the king’s sister, was divorced from Henry Holland, Duke of Exeter, by means of her own suite’ (Stow 1615, 425). In the first (and only) parliament of Richard III, St Leger was described as having ‘by sediciouse means, as it is notorily [ie notoriously] knowen, married Anne Duchesse of Excestr’ [Exeter]’ (Strachey 1767–77, 6, 242).

⁴³ Carpenter 1996, 1, 131–2; 2, 27.

⁴⁴ *CalPR*, 1467–77, 417.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 612; 1476–85, 558. On the king’s appointments of his servants in the South-West, see Gill 1999–2000, 46.

⁴⁶ *CalPR*, 1467–77, 426.

Polruan for their illegal activities.⁴⁷ On 12 March he was given an Exchequer warrant for payment in carrying out his duties as keeper of Guildford manor, and in April his name was listed among the feoffees of the manor of Hinton Pippard, Wiltshire.⁴⁸

In 1475 Edward IV carried out an invasion of France as a riposte for the help Louis XI had given to his enemies in 1470. The undertaking was known as 'The Great Enterprise', though in the event it turned out to be little more than a demonstration raid. For the campaign, Edward relied heavily upon his household to provide fighting men. Thomas St Leger not only took a contingent abroad, but also played an important role in the peace negotiations. It was as a 'king's squire of the body' that, on 21 October 1474, he indentured to serve for a year in the Duchy of Normandy and Realm of France with 20 'spears', including himself, and 200 archers.⁴⁹ Within some six weeks of landing at Calais early in July 1475, Edward was considering making peace and, on 13 August, he sent out instructions for his delegation who were to meet the French near Amiens on the following day. The English negotiators consisted of John, Lord Howard, Dr John Morton (Master of the Rolls), William Dudley (Dean of the Chapel Royal), and Thomas St Leger himself.⁵⁰ With Howard and a herald, St Leger met Philippe de Commines and the French lord, Ymbert de Batarnay, to decide upon a suitable meeting-place for the two kings: they chose Picquigny.⁵¹ In the settlement, not only did Edward and some of his leading nobles receive handsome pensions or gifts from Louis, but men of lesser rank – such as Sir Thomas Montgomery and Thomas St Leger – did so too.⁵²

The mid-1470s were in some ways the high-water mark of St Leger's career. On 16 October 1475 his custodianship of Guildford Park and the manor of Claygate-in-Ash were made into life tenures, and on 17 February 1476 he, his brother, James, and Nicholas Gaynesford obtained the manor of Chaldon in Surrey.⁵³ With the death of his wife, Anne, in January 1476, he effectively acquired a free tenancy of the large estates in Devon, Somerset, Hertfordshire, Essex, Westmorland, Yorkshire, Rutland, Bedfordshire and London which had once belonged to her first husband, the Duke of Exeter. On 26 November the escheators in those shires were told to deliver seisin (ie possession) to St Leger.⁵⁴ His control of these valuable estates must not only have added to his finances, influence, and attachment to the House of York, but also created some envy and friction. A hint of such tension could have been the attack by a servant of Sir Thomas Fulford of Devon upon a servant of St Leger, for which Fulford bound himself in 100 marks to the latter on 21 May 1477 to compensate St Leger's man.⁵⁵

More official responsibilities were given to Thomas St Leger on 12 July 1477 with his appointment as a Justice of the Peace in Hampshire, a post he was to hold until 14 May 1483.⁵⁶ During the course of 1477 Clarence exasperated his brother the king to the point

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 464, 491, 492. For Bodrugan, see Ross 1974, 410–11.

⁴⁸ *CalCR*, 1468–76, no 1522; TNA: E 404/76/1/83. The warrant is badly damaged, but it refers to men carrying out work at the manor. It seems fair to assume that St Leger had been actively involved in some supervisory way at Guildford.

⁴⁹ TNA: E101/71/5/966. He and the spears/spearsmen were to be paid at 12d a day, with a daily 'reward' of 6d; the archers were to receive 6d a day. The indenture was signed by St Leger at Bristol.

⁵⁰ Calmette & Durville 1924–5, 2, 45 and n.1; Rymer 1704–35, 5, iii, 65; *CalPR*, 1467–77, 583.

⁵¹ Calmette & Durville 1924–5, 2, 59; de Mandrot 1901–3, 1, 312.

⁵² Calmette & Durville 1924–5, 2, 52–3, 241.

⁵³ *CalPR*, 1467–77, 548; *CalCR*, 1468–76, no 1558. St Leger was probably the principal party in the Chaldon transaction. He was granted Claygate for expenses in keeping the game in Guildford Park (*VCH*, 3, 342).

⁵⁴ *CalCR*, 1476–85, nos 15–16. After Holland's forfeiture in 1461, Edward IV granted most of the Holland estates to his own sister Anne, Duchess of Exeter. Later, in 1467, they were vested in Anne, daughter of the Holland union, with remainder to her mother, the duchess. Anne Holland died in 1474 and the duchess in January 1476. After the latter's death St Leger enjoyed a 'free tenancy' of the Holland properties (Ross 1974, 336, n.2, and authorities cited).

⁵⁵ *CalCR*, 1476–85, no 222.

⁵⁶ *CalPR*, 1476–85, 572.

that he was sent to the Tower in June to be eventually tried for treason.⁵⁷ It was for the purpose of dealing with the duke that parliament was called to meet at Westminster on 16 January 1478. Positive efforts were made to secure ‘a docile lower house’ and of the 291 known members of the Commons a fifth enjoyed links with the government.⁵⁸ Thomas St Leger, who headed the list of electors, was clearly instrumental in ensuring the return of ‘dependable’ members for Surrey when the elections were held at Guildford on 16 December 1477.⁵⁹ In March and April 1478, after the death of Clarence, St Leger, with Thomas Bouchier and Nicholas Gaynesford, were appointed to enquire into what estates the late duke had held in Surrey.⁶⁰ St Leger was, in fact, one of the central figures dealing with Clarence’s forfeited estates, for on 6 April he was made feodary (an official responsible for receiving revenues) for them in Somerset, Devon, and Cornwall.⁶¹ The patent of appointment described St Leger as a ‘knight of the body’.

Many other appointments during the next few years underline the trust that the king placed in him. For instance, on 24 May 1478, he was included in a commission of oyer and terminer in Kent with Lord Hastings and Sir Thomas Bouchier; on 27 June he was named keeper for life of the royal park of Henley in Ash, Surrey; on 8 July he was made joint Master of the King’s Harthounds with Henry Bouchier, Earl of Essex; and on 8 August, with Hastings and another firm loyalist, Sir Thomas Burgh, he was granted £2000 a year from the Prior and Convent of Ely, during the vacancy of the see of Ely following the death of Bishop William Grey.⁶² Two pieces of evidence throw light on personal contacts: in June 1478 St Leger had been one of the co-feoffees for Elizabeth Cook, wife of the wealthy London alderman, Sir Thomas Cook; and in August he was named among several witnesses to a declaration by Edward, son of Lord Hastings, and Mary Hungerford that they were related in the third degree of kinship.⁶³

Other information shows Sir Thomas St Leger as taking a direct interest in ecclesiastical matters in the South-West at this time: in 1478, as patron of Holsworthy, Devon, he nominated one William Sylke, licentiate-in-law, to the living; and in February 1479 he made a once-only grant of the advowson of Blagdon, Somerset, to Sir John St Lo, knight.⁶⁴ Official appointments, too, reflect his dual involvement in the South-East and South-West. For example, on 17 December 1478 he was named in a panel to enquire into lands lately held in Devon by James Derneford esquire; similarly, on 23 September 1479 he was appointed with Peter Courtenay, Bishop of Exeter, and Thomas Grey, Marquis of Dorset (the queen’s son by her first marriage) to an investigation into the lands formerly held by Sir Fulk Fitz Warin in Somerset, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall.⁶⁵ His lucrative post as feodary of Clarence’s lands in Dorset, Somerset and Cornwall was made permanent on 26 January 1479; and on 10 May his income was potentially increased when he was granted custody of the manor and advowson of Oldbury, Gloucestershire, together with other lands in that county, and also in Somerset and Wiltshire because of the mental incapacity of William Thorpe.⁶⁶

In Surrey, his position as a Justice of the Peace was renewed on 15 August 1479; and in October 1480 Sir Thomas was included in a commission of array there, together with other

⁵⁷ For the background to Clarence’s treason and punishment, see Ross 1974, 239–43.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁵⁹ TNA: C 219/17/3, pt 3, 118. Elected for Surrey were Sir George Browne and John Wood of Molesey, both ‘reconciled’ Yorkists. For full treatment of Wood, see Roskell 1959b.

⁶⁰ *CalPR*, 1476–85, 109, 111.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 107, 112, 114, 122; Hardy 1873, 710.

⁶³ *CalCR*, 1476–85, no 475; Twenlow 1955, **13**, pt 2, 689–90. For the celebrated, and probably unjust, trial of Cook in 1468, see Ross 1974, 99–101; Hicks 1978.

⁶⁴ du Boulay 1957, 333; Maxwell-Lyte 1937, 449.

⁶⁵ *CalPR*, 1476–85, 147, 183.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 134, 151. It should be noted, however, that the life grant as feodary in Somerset and Dorset was modified on 27 June 1479 to one held during the minority of Clarence’s heir (*ibid.*, 132).

Yorkist loyalists such as Nicholas Gaynesford.⁶⁷ More official appointments followed in 1481: on 12 February he was a commissioner to enquire into what lands had been held in Dorset by the attainted James, late Earl of Wiltshire; two weeks later he headed a panel to examine the complaint of a merchant, Robert Hardyng, that his ship *la Trinite* of Denby and other vessels had deliberately been driven ashore at Mount's Bay in Cornwall the previous December; and on 7 December 1481 he was a member of a body, headed by Thomas, Marquis of Dorset, to investigate the escape of felons in Hampshire.⁶⁸

By this time in his career St Leger had been through what can be described as the regular *cursus honorum* of a late 15th century country gentleman, holding such offices as government commissioner, Justice of the Peace, sheriff, and parliamentary knight of the shire. Not only that, but he was a well-known figure in both the south-east and south-west of the country, a point brought out in a letter, possibly written in 1481, by John Skynner to Sir William Stonor. The writer makes it clear that much prestige was attached to the office of sheriff, the 'worcheppfollyst' in the shire. After having urged Stonor to put himself forward for the post, Skynner continued by saying that he had been told that 'Sir Thomas Selynger hopyt to be scherche this year.'⁶⁹ However, it is not known which shire St Leger had in mind.

Yet another good example of his standing, influence, and close links with the royal circle was that, in 1482, the City of Canterbury gave two capons to Sir George Browne and Sir Thomas for their goodwill of the king.⁷⁰ Still controller of the Mint at this time, two receipts for wages, each for £15 6s 8d, have survived given by St Leger to John Wood, keeper of the Mint.⁷¹

It is possible that St Leger was elected to the last parliament of Edward IV, which met at Westminster on 18 January 1483. However, although the name of the Speaker is known, the names of most other members are not. Nevertheless, two items were transacted in this assembly which did directly affect him: first, there was the exemption of certain named individuals, of whom St Leger was one (others included Sir Thomas Vaughan, treasurer of the king's chamber, and so a key household officer), from the Act of Apparel which prohibited the wearing of 'fur, purple and gold cloth' by non-nobles;⁷² and, secondly, the Act which settled the estates of Henry Holland, late Duke of Exeter, upon St Leger's daughter, Anne, who was contracted to marry Thomas Grey, son of the Marquis of Dorset, and, therefore, the queen's grandson. The legal device which allowed this arrangement certainly favoured the Woodville circle and perhaps bound St Leger more closely to the queen's family.⁷³ The fact that both acts touched his interests sensitively could strengthen the possibility that Sir Thomas sat in Edward IV's last parliament, quite likely for Surrey with John Wood, who became Speaker.⁷⁴

The unexpected death of the king on 9 April 1483 was to have wide repercussions which were to affect the careers of many of his close associates, including that of St Leger.

For the moment, however, the obsequies had to be carried out. With Sir William Parr, controller of the royal household, Sir John Astley and Sir William Stonor, he held the canopy over the king's body as it was taken into Westminster Abbey on 27 April; and he was among the members of the royal household who maintained vigil at Windsor.⁷⁵

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 574, 244.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 245 (*bis*), 263; *CalIM*, 8 (2003), 1422–85, no 472.

⁶⁹ Carpenter 1996, 2, 134. The letter does not make it clear which sheriffdom St Leger hoped to obtain. Since Skynner was asking for Stonor's assistance in trying to recover lands in Modbury, Devon, it was possibly in that county where St Leger sought to be sheriff.

⁷⁰ HMC *9th Report* (1883), App pt i, 137.

⁷¹ TNA: E 101/298/32/1.

⁷² Strachey 1767–77, 6, 221.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 215–18; MacGibbon 1938, 134n; Pugh 1972, 111–12; Ross 1974, 336–7. The Act which dealt with the Holland estates has been described as one 'wholly partial to the Woodville interest' (Ross 1981, 187). Essentially the settlement was a device which stretched legality by depriving the rightful heir of the duke of Exeter on the grounds of his attainder.

⁷⁴ Roskell (1965, 291) suggested that Wood 'almost certainly sat for Surrey or Sussex in the parliament of 1483'.

⁷⁵ *Archaeologia*, 1 (1770), 350; Tighe & Davis 1858, 1, 392–3.

In the immediate aftermath of the death of the king, little changed. St Leger was still employed on official commissions: on 27 April he was included in a panel to assess the alien subsidies and appoint collectors in Hampshire; and on 1 August he headed a similar body in Devon.⁷⁶ It was possibly about this time that he received a gift of two gallons of wine worth 2d from the city of Exeter – a present which suggests that the city authorities considered Sir Thomas's goodwill worth cultivating.⁷⁷

With the coup carried out by Richard, Duke of Gloucester, on 1 May 1483, things began to change. Some of the household of the boy-king, Edward V, were dismissed, probably because they were considered to be too close to the Woodvilles. Most of the late king's servants seemingly transferred their loyalty smoothly to his son.⁷⁸ Yet, with links with Hastings, Buckingham and the Woodvilles, as well as his transparent friendship with the late king, St Leger could hardly have been above suspicion once Richard's policy to seize the throne had become evident.⁷⁹ No doubt it was his equivocal loyalty to the new king, Richard III (who was, it is worth remembering, his brother-in-law) which caused his removal from the Hampshire bench of justices in May, and from Surrey in June.⁸⁰ Interestingly enough Sir Thomas was involved in the coronation of Richard on Sunday, 6 July, for which he was given a silver cloth. Nevertheless, he lost his post as controller of the Mint.⁸¹

By the autumn of 1483 St Leger had cause for unease and dissatisfaction with the new regime, sufficiently so for him to take part in what is generally known as 'Buckingham's Rebellion'. He was, in fact, only one of many who felt strongly enough to take up arms in October 1483. The rising was widespread across southern England. As one modern historian has written, the opposition to the king was a 'roll-call of the leading aristocracy and governors in every shire from Kent to Oxfordshire and Cornwall'. In Kent prominent among the rebels were Sir George Browne of Maidstone and Nicholas Gaynesford of Carshalton, Surrey, both of whom had associations with St Leger (they had, for instance, represented Guildford in the parliament of 1472–5, when St Leger sat for Surrey) whereas in Surrey Thomas St Leger appears to have had an important role.⁸² However, there was a lack of co-ordination between the rebels, and when Buckingham was betrayed and executed at Salisbury on 2 November the revolt began to crumble.⁸³ The king moved to Exeter to deal with opponents in the South-West now led by St Leger. Taken at his place at Torrington, Thomas tried to bargain for his life, but the king was not disposed to leniency, even towards his brother-in-law (he felt personal venom at the betrayal of Buckingham and St Leger) and he was executed at Exeter on 13 November.⁸⁴

Action quickly followed to take control of Sir Thomas St Leger's properties. On the very day of his execution orders were issued to deliver monies which belonged to him into the hands of the crown and, at the same time, his castle and manor of Torrington were granted to one of the king's northern followers, Sir Thomas Everyngham.⁸⁵ In Surrey his forfeited lands of Down Place and Field Place, both in Compton, were later restored to his daughter, Anne. A hundred acres of pasture, also in Compton, were granted to Walter Mistlebrook (a

⁷⁶ *CalPR*, 1476–85, 353, 395.

⁷⁷ DRO: Exeter Receivers' Accounts, 22–3 Ed IV and Rich III.

⁷⁸ On these points see Hicks 1978, 135.

⁷⁹ In 1481 St Leger had been a co-feeffer with Hastings and Buckingham (*CalIPM*, Henry VII, 1, no 392). Possibly he had links, too, with the Woodvilles but, as Hicks (1978, 159) has observed, 'who had not?'. Ross (1981, 109) held that St Leger 'had tied his fortunes to the Woodville group and especially to Dorset' after his (St Leger's) marriage to Anne, Duchess of Exeter.

⁸⁰ *CalPR*, 1476–85, 572, 574.

⁸¹ Gill 1999–2000, 60–2.

⁸² Hicks 2003, 154; *VCH*, 1, 365.

⁸³ Ross 1981, 117.

⁸⁴ Ellis 1811, 671; Kingsford 1905, 192; Ross 1981, 117. For Richard's attitude towards Buckingham and St Leger, see Hicks 1978, 162.

⁸⁵ Horrox & Hammond 1979–83, 1, 133; 2, 34.

former official of Edward IV, but who continued to serve Richard III).⁸⁶ His landed interests extended even to Lancashire where, on 16 December, Lord Stanley was ordered to take control of St Leger's manor of Brightmet.⁸⁷ In 1484 all his property in Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire were allocated to Thomas Fowler, usher of the chamber and joint sheriff of those counties.⁸⁸ St Leger had, apparently, once held plate to the value of £138 6s 8d in pledge on behalf of the Abbot and Convent of Malmesbury. That, too, was recorded on 9 February 1484 as having been forfeited to the Crown.⁸⁹

That St Leger had felt that he was in a position to bargain for his life calls for some consideration of his wealth. Although it is not possible to provide a precise indication of his income, some figures can be given which reflect his rise in status. Two important points can be made at the outset: first, that his family belonged to the lesser gentry in their possession of only a handful of manors in Kent; and, secondly, that Thomas St Leger's prosperity depended essentially on royal patronage, rather than his own acquisition of estate. As it happened, about the time of his birth an assessment of people's wealth had been carried out (1436) for the purposes of taxation. The family must have fallen into that category of 1200 esquires whose annual income ranged between £20 and £35, whereas the next higher – the 750 lesser knights – enjoyed between £40 and £100.⁹⁰

Two different sources can be identified as having been the main basis of St Leger's increased wealth: one was the profits of office; the other the return from land. As early as 1461 his controllership of the Mint was worth £26 13s 4d a year. From his constablership of Rochester he was to receive £36 3s 4d annually, and from that of Farnham £26 13s 4d when first appointed, but soon raised to £36 3s 4d. Clearly these were quite substantial sums of money. In this category, too, we can put the various keeperships or custodianships he was given during his life: Claygate-in-Ash (£6 13s 4d); Field Place (£2 13s 4d); Guildford Park (£16 13s 4s); Chestonwood (£3 0s 10d), and Kennington (£13 6s 8d). From the manor of 'Whithamhill' (the name is now lost), in Hampshire, there was another return of £4 6s 0d. Assuming that these monies were forthcoming, St Leger was receiving, at the height of his career, just short of £150 annually.

There were, however, other sources of income, such as that of an esquire of the household and a king's sergeant, which probably brought in more regular payments. The latter post was worth £26 13s 4d. Lucrative, too, were grants of forfeited manors (for instance, those of Sir Thomas Ffinderne) and the wardship of heirs during their minority or incapacity (for example, of Thomas Langham in 1462, and of William Thorpe in 1479). Even more important financially could well have been his appointment in 1479 as feodary of the late Duke of Clarence's estates in Dorset, Somerset and Cornwall. Most lucrative must have been the income which came to him from the estates of Henry Holland, Duke of Exeter, and over which St Leger probably exerted much control from 1467.⁹¹ Unfortunately, the precise incomes of these 'perquisites' are unknown, yet it is not unreasonable to assume that they were valuable, and that at the end of his life St Leger's total income amounted to more than the £208 a year which, according to the assessment of 1436, would have placed him among the 'greater knights' of the land.

Symbolically, nothing could illustrate better Sir Thomas St Leger's centrality at the court of Edward IV than his friendship with the king himself (to whom he also owed his wealth and status) and St Leger's foundation of a chantry in St George's chapel, Windsor, where prayers were to be said for the good estate of the king, queen, the king's mother, Cecily, Duchess of York, Richard Beauchamp, Bishop of Salisbury, Richard, late Duke of York,

⁸⁶ *VCH*, 3, 19, 20, 342; Horrox & Hammond 1979–83, 1, 250. For Mistlebrook, see *CallM*, 8, 1422–85, nos 496, 497, 501; Horrox 1989, 211.

⁸⁷ Horrox & Hammond 1979–83, 2, 61.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2, 32.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 2, 89.

⁹⁰ For an up-to-date assessment of this question, see Harriss 2005, 137–8 and authorities cited.

⁹¹ Ramsey 1892, 2, 412, n.2.



Fig 1 Brass of Sir Thomas St Leger and his wife, Anne, engraved c 1497, St George's Chapel, Windsor. (Photograph by Professor Nigel Saul, with permission of the Dean and Canons of Windsor)

Anne, late Duchess of Exeter (she had died in 1476) and Sir Thomas himself. Surviving documentary evidence illustrates part of the process by which the chantry was established. A licence was issued, and a memorandum made of it, on 30 March 1481, which allowed St Leger to grant the manor of Ham, Surrey, and lands in Hartley Westpall, Hampshire, for the support of his foundation. A release of Ham was made on 1 October 1481 by one Richard Rovcetur. In addition he was permitted to grant the manor of Chertsey and lands called 'College lands' in Chiddingfold. The charter proper followed on 20 April 1482.⁹²

Sir Thomas St Leger 'of Guildford' suffered attainder in the parliament of 1484, but that blight was removed in the first parliament of Henry VII.⁹³ Sir Thomas and his wife were buried in the Rutland chapel in St George's Chapel, Windsor, and where a copper-gilt plaque commemorates them. In the centre of the chapel is a fine early 16th century tomb with recumbent effigies of Sir George Manners, Lord Ros and his wife, Anne, who were respectively St Leger's son-in-law and daughter. The arms of St Leger were 'Azure fretty argent a chief or'.⁹⁴

⁹² *CalPR*, 1476–85, 269–70; Tighe & Davis 1858, **1**, 398; *VCH*, **3**, 14, 409; Dalton 1957, 104, ref XV.58.C5; 536, ref XV.21.4.

⁹³ Wedgwood & Holt 1936, 737; Strachey 1767–77, **6**, 273.

⁹⁴ Cokayne *et al*, **11**, 108; *VCHBerks*, **3**, 39–40; *VCH*, **3**, 19; Pevsner 1966, 277. That Sir Thomas and his wife were buried in the Rutland Chapel is made clear in the wording on the plaque, part of which reads as follows: 'Wythin thys Chappell lyethe beryed Anne Duchess of Exceter suster unto the noble kyng Edwarde the forte. And also the body of syr Thomas Sellynger knight her husband which hathe Funde within thys College a Chauntre with too prestys sy'gyng for eu'more[...]' (cited from S M Bond 1958, 4–5). The arms of Bouchier and St Leger have been identified on the 15th century west door of the church of St Thomas of Canterbury, Newton Tracey (Cherry & Pevsner 2002, 598). A photograph of the brass has been reproduced in a recent article (Saul 2007, 232). This notes that the brass has several interesting features, in that it had probably been executed about 1495 by a goldsmith, and that it was 'etched' rather than engraved or incised.

The interest of the career of Sir Thomas St Leger lies in more than his being just typical of his class. Certainly he went through the usual offices of a country squire in late 15th century England – royal commissioner, Justice of the Peace, sheriff, and parliamentary knight of the shire, but he was also involved in military and diplomatic affairs; and for long served in the king's household. Certainly he prospered materially at the king's hands; and his life was not free of scandal in a court not known for its morality. Yet his service to the House of York – to Edward, his queen, and his son – was long and loyal; and, without doubt, it was St Leger's objection to Richard of Gloucester's aim to deny the young Edward V his throne that determined his rebellion in October 1483, which cost him his life.

APPENDIX
ELECTION INDENTURE FOR SURREY, 1467
(Latin extensions in brackets)

- 1 Hec Indentura fact(a) apud Guldeford in com(itatu) Surr' in pleno com(itatu) tento ib(ide)m xx die maij Anno r(egni) r(egis) Edwardi quarti septimo int(er) Thomas Vaughan
- 2 Armig(eru)m vic(omitem) com(itatus) p(re)d(ic)ti ex una p(ar)te & Humfr(edu)m Burghchier milite(m) Nich(ole)m Gaynesford Joh(ann)em Wood Will(elmu)m Brandon Ed(wardu)m Stace Rad(ulphu)m Ley(h) Joh(ann)em Elmebrigge
- 3 Joh(ann)em Medford Rob(er)tum Wynteshull Henr(icum) Stoghton Joh(ann)em Neudegate Armig(er)os Will(elmu)m Otteworth Joh(ann)em Codyngton Joh(ann)em Danyell Joh(ann)em Sk[?ynner]
- 4 Ric(ardum) Thame Will(elmu)m Asshurst Joh(ann)em fframpton Joh(ann)em Atte Leyh de Adyngton R(ic)ardu)m Skynner Nich(ole)m Chamberleyn Rob(er)t(u)m ffekenhham Henr(icum) S[?lyfeld]
- 5 Ric(ardum) Lusser & Thomam Cage(r) ac alios de co(mmun)itate com(itatus) p(re)d(ic)ti ex altera p(ar)te testat(ur) q(uo)d ip(s)i virtute br(ev)is d(o)m(ini) Reg(is) eide(m) vi(comit)e direct(e) huic Indentur(e)
- 6 consut(o) eligerunt tunc & ib(ide)m Thomam Seyntlegier & Joh(ann)em Gaynesford Armigeros essendi milites p(ro) com(itatu) p(re)d(ic)to ad parlamentum d(o)m(ini) Reg(is) apud
- 7 West(monasterium) t(er)cio die Junii p(ro)x(imo) futur(o) tenend(o) Ita q(uo)d ijdem milites p(ro) se & co(mmun)itate com(itatus) p(re)d(ic)ti plenam & sufficient(em) potestate(m) & autoritatem
- 8 Ad faciend(um) & concentiend(um) hiis que tunc ib(ide)m favente d(omi)no contige(rin)t ordinari In cuius rei testimoniu(m) huic Indenturis p(ar)tes sigilla sua
- 9 Alt(er)uatim apposuerunt Dat(a) die anno & loco sup(ra)d(i)tis

Translation

(modern punctuation, but original spelling of personal surnames)

- 1 This indenture, made at Guildford in the county of Surrey in the full county court held there on 20th day of May in the seventh year of the reign of king Edward the fourth [1467], between Thomas Vaughan
- 2 esquire,⁹⁵ sheriff of the aforesaid county on the one part, and Humfrey Burghchier knight, Nicholas Gaynesford,⁹⁶ John Wode, William Brandon, Edward Stace, Radulph Leyh, John Elmebrigge,

⁹⁵ Thomas Vaughan was closely attached to the Woodville family and to the king. He served as treasurer of the chamber from 1465 to 1483, but was one of Richard of Gloucester's early victims, being arrested at Stony Stratford on 30 April 1483 and beheaded on 25 June (Ross 1974, 103, 324; 1981, 72, 88).

⁹⁶ Nicholas Gaynesford sat five times for Surrey constituencies, including twice for the shire, between 1453 and 1491. He took part in 'Buckingham's Rising' in 1483, but survived to serve Henry VII. The fine brass to him and his wife is in Carshalton church (Wedgwood & Holt 1936, 367–8; Stephenson 1913, 26ff).

- 3 John Medford, Robert Wynteshull, Henry Stoghton, John Neudegate, esquires, William Otteworth, John Codyngton, John Danyell, John Sk[?ynner]
- 4 Richard Thame, William Asshurst, John fframpton, John Atte Leyh de Adyngton, Richard Skynner, Nicholas Chamberleyn, Robert ffekenham, Henry S[?lyfeld],
- 5 Richard Lusser, and Thomas Cager and others of the community of the aforesaid county on the other part, witness that those men by virtue of the writ of the same lord king directed to the sheriff and by this indenture
- 6 customarily have elected, then and there, Thomas Seyntlegier and John Gaynesford esquires to be knights for the aforesaid county at the parliament of the lord king at
- 7 Westminster to be held on the third day of June next coming, so that those same knights, for themselves and for the community of the aforesaid county, [have] full and sufficient power and authority
- 8 to do and consent to those things which then there, by God's favour, may be determined. In witness of which matter of the indenture the parties
- 9 have alternately put their seals. Dated the day, year and place abovesaid.

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 E 403/844 Exchequer of Receipt: Issue Rolls
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