

ART. III. – *Sir Thomas Parr (1407-1461)*. BY SUSAN E. JAMES, Ph.D. (Cantab.).

IN 1371, a convicted murderer from Lancashire,¹ named William del Parre, secured a pardon for his crime in order to join the retinue of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and to fight for the duke on the continent. So well did he serve his master that some time between 1380 and 1382, he was allowed to marry Elizabeth, heiress of the de Roos family of Kendal, a junior branch of the de Roos of Hamlake. By his death in 1404, Sir William Parr had served as soldier, treaty negotiator, ambassador and king's councillor, first to the duke of Lancaster and then to his son, Henry IV. His marriage enabled Parr to move from a small patrimony in Lancashire to his wife's extensive inheritance in Westmorland and found the fortunes of the Parr family of Kendal. Sir William Parr died in 1404. His son John died four years later² leaving a son, Thomas, then a year old, whose lifetime was to span the reigns of the three Lancastrian kings – a career described only very briefly in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. During this career he built up the fortunes of his family in Westmorland to a pre-eminent position.

Upon his father's death in 1408, Thomas's wardship was granted to his mother, Agnes, Sir Thomas Beauford and Sir Thomas Brounflete.³ Some time in the following nine years, Agnes Parr married John Merbury.⁴ On 9 July 1413, probably about the same time as the marriage, she surrendered the wardship of her son and his lands to Sir Thomas Tunstall of Thurland Castle, Lancs.⁵ William Torvar and James Harrington for 200 marks (£133. 6s. 8d.).⁶ Parr lived at Thurland Castle during his minority and Tunstall married him to his daughter, Alice. The Tunstalls were ardent Lancastrians throughout the fifteenth century, but this had little lasting influence on Parr, whose Westmorland estates bordered those of the Nevilles, earls of Westmorland. When he reached his majority and assumed his Kendal inheritance, a mutually supportive relationship arose between the politically aggressive Nevilles and the aggressively ambitious Parr. Parr's value to the Nevilles depended on his own importance as a local magnate and his future advancement on his ability to furnish aid and support to a patron when needed.

Power in Kendal was based on possession of the lands of the original barony of Kendal, which had been twice divided. The Richmond Fee represented one-half of the original barony, the Lumley and Marquis Fees each a quarter. In the fifteenth century, the lands of the Richmond Fee were normally held by absentee landlords, being granted from royal relative to royal relative. The Lumley Fee, too, went through division and transfer, at one point belonging to Parr's enemies, the Bellingham family. The holders of the Lumley lands, however, had merely local significance; only the Parr lands, or as they were later known, the Marquis Fee, were held continuously until 1571 by one family and progressively augmented through Clifford and Neville patronage, and, after 1461, by royal favouritism.

The first Sir William did little to extend his wife's de Roos holdings,⁷ preferring to act as an absentee landlord, but Thomas Parr had both the time and the need to consolidate and extend them. Much of the estate was held in dower by three relicts of the Parrs until 1436 when his mother Agnes Parr, the last dowager, died. She had signed her dower portion over to her son in 1429 in exchange for a yearly forty-mark allowance.⁸ At her death, Parr took

the oath of fealty and received full seisin of the dower third of his estate for a fine of two marks.⁹ Finally, at the age of twenty-eight, in law as well as in fact, Parr could enjoy his full income, amounting possibly to £80-£100 yearly. The estate totalled at least 5083 acres of land, 700 of them arable, and 57 messuages and presumably Thomas also held the small Lancashire estate which was the first Sir William Parr's patrimony. This included lands in Parr and Sutton and a toft in Wigan,¹⁰ a parcel held of the Earl of Derby by knight's service, and a yearly rent of 15d. "being thus identified with the quarter of a moiety held by the above-named William in 1370 . . .". Parr, himself, made only one known purchase: a plot called "le Groute by le Howes"¹¹ from one Baldwin Scheppessed, which he bought to extend his holdings in Helsington.

To counter the recession of income from land, subsisting throughout the greater part of the fifteenth century, Parr turned from outright land purchase to royal leaseholds as a means of increasing both his income and his local political control. Basically there were three of these leaseholds, all of them portions of the Richmond Fee held by Henry V's brother, John, Duke of Bedford, at his death in 1435. In May 1438, Parr was given the keeping of two-thirds of Bedford's lands (the ultimate third went to his widow, Jacquetta) in the Westmorland townships or hamlets of Crosthwaite, Hutton, Strickland Ketel, Frosethwaite and Helsington, the keeping of the fishery on the river Kent, and, in Lancashire, all of Bedford's lands in Whittington. The grant was for ten years, at a yearly farm of £25. 12s. 10d. with a maintenance clause.¹² During that time, should anyone else be found willing to offer more, the farm would go to the highest bidder. In February 1439 this grant was reconfirmed, with the addition "that Sir Thomas Parr shall sufficiently build anew, repair and maintain at his own charge one-half part of the Hoton [Hutton] water mill which the King is bound to do and then yield it to the King . . .".¹³ It is pertinent that in this area the decline in the revenues enjoyed by landlords, especially in Cumberland, was attributable partly to the decline of income from mills.¹⁴ Parr enjoyed the income from these lands for only five of the ten years of the original lease. In 1443 all Richmond Fee lands formerly held by Bedford, the Duchess' dower, were granted to the king's favourite, John, duke of Somerset and Earl of Kendal. The income from the Richmond Fee lands was roughly three times that of Parr's estates,¹⁵ so he cannot have been too pleased at being forced by the king to relinquish them half way through his lease.

In March 1445, another though lesser plum from the lands of Bedford fell into his hands: the keeping of two-thirds of the market tolls, the profits of local fairs, and the profits of "le wyndles et lepes de le weyle, with le bothes, shoppes and scamelles and with the bakery, le bankes and le court house of Kirkby in Kendal".¹⁶ This was a twelve-year farm at 60s. a year, but with a clause that should anyone offer more for the farm during that time Parr would lose the lease. Along with it went a twelve-year grant, at 20s. a year, of the keeping of the herbage ". . . of certain meadows and land called Wryholme alias Holmewery, county Cumberland, with all appurtenances . . .". Six years later, in July 1451, the king raised the rent from £3 to £4 and added a 3s. 4d. per year charge against the income, probably some sort of pension. He also extended the lease for a further twelve years, but it was a gratuitous gesture for twenty months later Henry VI granted the market tolls lease to the Earl of Richmond. Parr, left with a nominal 20s. a year herbage lease, farmed it to his son, William, for sixteen years at the same 20s. rate, presumably with the king's permission, as the original twelve-year lease was due to expire in March 1457. Parr also secured two other local sources of income. These were the tithes of Holme and Mintsfoot which were demised

to him at farm in 1431 for 10s. The farm of the Mintsfoot tithe, but not of Holme, was renewed to Parr in 1435, along with "... a place of which the name is lost (which) lay fallow in 1431",¹⁷ for which he paid 5s.

One final transaction, which may indicate another royal grant of farm, occurred in May 1428, when Parr and Ralph Blennerhasset of Suffolk (probably a scion of the Cumberland Blennerhassets) committed, by mainprise, to John Broughton, esquire, the keeping of five messuages, five bovates of land and ten acres of meadow in the township of Skelton, a burgage in Carlisle and a quit rent of 13s. 4d. a year from another burgage in Carlisle.¹⁸ This transaction may have been the subletting of a grant at farm as it was later cancelled by Henry VI, who farmed it directly to Broughton at a flat rate of 26s. 8d. a year.

The final grant made to Parr by the Crown was made by Edward IV on 29 July 1461. This was the wardship and marriage of John Hothom, a distant cousin of the Parrs through the de Thweng family. The Hothoms, an ancient Yorkshire family seated at Scorbrough near Beverley, held extensive lands in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Westmorland.¹⁹ Several of their Westmorland properties neighboured those of the Parrs, and Staveley manor was held of one-sixth of one-quarter of the Parrs' manor of Kirkby-in-Kendal, Parr being the effective overlord. It was an exceedingly lucrative wardship, and, as the ward was little more than a baby,²⁰ it extended Parr's influence into Yorkshire and increased his power in Westmorland and Lancashire. His income must have at least doubled if the size of the Hothom estates is any indication. This substantial royal grant and mark of royal favour from the new Yorkist king was the pattern of the future for the next three generations of Parrs.

Thomas Parr's position in his own community is reflected in the types of office he held there. As a leading member of the local gentry, he sat on most of the north-western commissions of the peace and many commissions of array during a thirty-year career. Knighted some time between 1430 and 1432, he was one of a small closed group of local magnates who monopolized all Crown commissions in Cumberland and Westmorland in the fifteenth century. Under Henry VI, he served as a justice of the peace for Westmorland in July 1432, February 1434, March 1437, July 1454 and July 1456. As late as July 1459,²¹ just two months before he joined his fate irrevocably to the Earl of Salisbury's, Parr was again named to a commission of the peace for Westmorland. Under Edward IV, he was justice for Cumberland in May 1461 and for Westmorland in May and September 1461.²² He was named by Henry VI to the commissions of array for Westmorland of July 1436, July 1437 (also for Cumberland), and November 1448.²³ Edward also appointed him to the commission of September 1461 for Westmorland and the May and November 1461 commissions for Cumberland, the latter called to defend the borders from an expected invasion by Henry VI, supported by Scottish troops.²⁴

Parr served also on various special commissions. He was appointed in January 1436 to the Westmorland commission for tax assessment to levy the parliamentary subsidy granted in 1435 for the defence of the realm.²⁵ In February 1457, he served on a commission to inquire into the lands held by Thomas Lord Dacre at the day of his death, their value, and the identity of Dacre's lawful heir.²⁶ In December of the same year, due to the imminent danger of a French invasion, a commission to levy fifty-six archers in Westmorland was sent to Parr, Sir Richard Musgrave, John Crackenthorpe of Hugill, William Lancaster, John Hilton, John Wharton and Henry Bellingham.²⁷ All these were Lancastrian commissions, evidence of the fact that, up until July 1459, Parr was looked upon both as an influential

man, whose loyalties were not suspect enough to exclude him from the operation of local government, and one whose cooperation was thought necessary for that government's efficient functioning. Sir Thomas's Yorkist affiliations were soon to become apparent, and he continued his exercise of local power with the full favour of the new Yorkist regime. On 12 November 1460, Parr and his two elder sons served on a commission "to arrest and commit to prison all persons guilty of unlawful gatherings, congregations, associations, combinations and seiges, and if they resist, to call together all lieges of Westmorland and Cumberland and other counties adjacent to fight them".²⁸ This was an attempt to protect the Yorkist cause in the heavily Lancastrian northern shires. It was reinforced by commissions of peace and array, and, on 6 June 1461,²⁹ another commission was named to arrest recalcitrant Lancastrians, namely Gamaliel Pennington, Christopher Broughton and James Uriel, and bring them before the king's council. The senior commissioners were Sir Thomas Parr and Sir Edward Beetham.

Sir Thomas also held local offices which allowed him a wide latitude of action in the county and supplied him with sources of income and political control. In 1430-31 he was granted the office of escheator in Cumberland and Westmorland³⁰ and in 1435-46 under-sheriff for Westmorland,³¹ a powerful office because the hereditary sheriff, Lord Clifford, was not a particularly aggressive official. Parr had Clifford's full support in the community and appears to have exercised the extensive powers of the shrievalty with an unhampered hand. Since the sheriff supervised shire court elections to parliament,³² especially in the northern shires, the shrievalty took on the appearance of an executive office and control of this office, in fact if not in title, was tantamount to control of the shire, particularly when the Crown was weak. This all-pervasive involvement by Parr in the affairs of the community, based as it was on his position as under-sheriff, can be seen in the numbers of land transactions which he witnessed or for which he served as trustee, and in the assorted local feuds in which he was involved or on which his influence was brought to bear. These span his entire career during the reign of Henry VI.

An example of the contempt in which the law was held by the local gentry, and the lengths to which they would go to subvert it in their own interests, is the case of Robert Crackenthorpe of Newbiggin. Crackenthorpe, a justice of the peace for Westmorland, appealed to Chancery in a suit against William and Oliver Thornborough and William Lancaster (all established landowners in Westmorland), who "by instigation of Sir John de Lancaster and Katherine, his wife" had waylaid him "with intent to slay",³³ as he returned from a session of the peace. "The interesting point is that the offenders included men who had sat in parliament for Westmorland and held commissions of the peace. So powerful was their local standing that it would have been useless to sue them in the country".³⁴ Crackenthorpe's appeal was supported jointly by the Earl of Westmorland and Sir Thomas Parr. The Thornboroughs were "maintained" by the Earl of Salisbury,³⁵ and it is significant that Thomas Parr sided publicly not with them but with Crackenthorpe and Westmorland, Salisbury's very much estranged nephew. The cause of the attack on Crackenthorpe was that, as a justice of the peace, he had held an investigation into a dispute over lands claimed by the Lancasters. Chancery proved unable to solve the situation and so prevent further violence. Crackenthorpe was murdered by the Lancasters and Thornboroughs in August 1443.³⁶

The continuing lack of effective control at the national level exacerbated local warfare in the 1440s and 1450s, and in Cumbria divisions deepened between the Percy and Neville

factions. In 1453 the rolls of parliament described the situation in Cumberland as “toon half of the shire was divided from tother”.³⁷ Conditions were no better in Westmorland. In 1446 Thomas Parr, Sir Thomas Strickland and six others were the recipients of a penal bond of 200 marks from eight bondees “to abide the award of certain arbitrators and to keep peace”³⁸ with Robert Garnett, John Hubbersty and others.

Another typical local feud in which Parr acted as mediator was that of the ubiquitous Thornboroughs and the Threlkelds of Meaburn,³⁹ who were related by marriage. This dispute, over seven marks from Meaburn manor owed to Threlkeld by William Thornborough, and 13s. 4d. for a black gown for one of Thornborough’s servants, involved jury intimidation, coercive violence and extensive litigation. In November 1447, an indenture to keep the peace and settle the dispute was drawn up in the presence of Thomas Parr, Richard Musgrave, John Broughton and Nicholas Leyburne, but such indentures were as much use as miniature dams against tidal waves.

Thomas Parr himself was involved in law-land disputes between 1435 and 1443. In 1440 he lost a legal battle with Thomas, prior of Conishead, when the prior recovered from Parr, by assize of novel disseisin, two messuages, 120 acres of land, six acres of meadow, 100 acres of pasture and 10 acres of wood in Scalthwaitrigg, all of which constituted the Parr interest and right in the Hospital of St Leonard’s, Kendal.⁴⁰ This had been part of the de Roos inheritance, and Parr was forced to quit-claim it to the prior although he did retain the right to present to St. Leonard’s chaplaincy.⁴¹

The effect of Lord Clifford’s support of Parr in his capacity as sheriff, Parr’s own influential position locally and his place in parliament are exemplified in the Parr-Bellingham feud, which made itself felt from Westmorland to Westminster. The Bellinghams, of Burneside near Kendal, were a long-established and influential Westmorland family. They also owned land in Helsington near the Parrs and at Strickland Roger. In 1404 the Bellinghams had held 20s. worth of land in Strickland Ketel of the Parrs, which they may still have done thirty years later. It may have been disputes over these lands which provided the spark for the fuse.

In 1441 Henry Bellingham made a complaint in the court of Chancery against Thomas Parr,⁴² claiming Parr had come to his house at Burneside “with a great multitude of people with intent to destroy and kill”. Parr was dissuaded from this intended violence by “true trefteye of gode Gentilmen of the same cuntre”. Bellingham however was still receiving threats from Parr, but because of Parr’s paramountcy in Kendal, he could not sue him successfully in the county. Robert Bellingham, Henry’s father, was indeed a Clifford foffeee but Clifford supported Parr and “the coroners of the same Shire bene his (Parr’s) meynyall men”.⁴³ Bellingham, therefore turned to the court of Chancery for aid.

Chancery did not satisfy the Bellinghams who took the matter into their own hands. In February 1445,⁴⁴ Thomas Parr was in London as knight of the shire for Cumberland. He took lodgings “on Cornwallis ground beside the Crane in the Wards of the Vyntrye”.⁴⁵ In the morning of the opening parliament, he and three servants, Robert Duket, Thomas Wryght and Matthew Pierson, left their lodgings for Westminster. On the road to the Thames they were “assaulted with intent to kill” by Henry Bellingham’s two younger brothers, Robert and Thomas, together with three others.⁴⁶ Parr’s servants were badly injured and the attackers were arrested. In March, Parr was granted, by private act of parliament, a writ of proclamation addressed to the sheriffs of the city of London, whose writ was to order the Bellinghams to appear before the King’s Bench a month from Easter

1446 or be attainted of felony. The outrage to parliament of an attack on one of its members caused the passage of an act “to protect members of Parliament from assault while in Parliament and in transit . . .”⁴⁷ If assaulted, a member of parliament was to have a writ of proclamation to the appropriate sheriff, “as by an Act in this saide present parliament for Sir Thomas Parr, Knyght, is in like case ordeined to be hade”, to be returned at the King’s Bench enabling the complainant to demand there the appearance of those against whom the writ was sworn, or else “such execution as is ordeined also in the saide Acte, for ye saide Sir Thomas”.⁴⁸

Before this act two statutes had given members of parliament recourse at law for any physical attack perpetrated on them or their servants: in 1432 to protect any lord or commoner attending parliament or council from assault,⁴⁹ and a Statute of 1403 protecting the servants of a knight of the shire from assault. Thus, when in 1445 the Commons prayed that the remedies and process prescribed in the act for Sir Thomas Parr should be upheld, the king replied that the two prior statutes should provide sufficient redress for the members of the Commons, in effect disallowing Parr’s act as a precedent for parliamentary litigation.⁵⁰

The Bellinghams failed to appear at the King’s Bench “for gret fere and drede of the seyde Acts”, their fear of reciprocal violence being greater than their fear of the courts. In 1449, however, they petitioned for a settlement of the dispute. In the 1449 parliament, in which Thomas Bellingham was a member for Arundel and Parr for Westmorland, Parr’s writ of proclamation was annulled as “the parties had come to an agreement”⁵¹ and Sir Thomas Parr and his servants had received satisfaction.⁵² The Bellinghams were pardoned at Parr’s request. A remnant of the settlement of this feud may exist in an undated boundary settlement between Sir Robert Bellingham and his son, Henry, and Sir Thomas Parr and his son, William. It fixes the boundaries of their contiguous lands in Strickland Roger, which may have been the original source of trouble.⁵³

Parr was not always either a combatant or litigant in local land transactions. Frequently, he acted as a witness or mediator for others. In January 1430, he witnessed a quit-claim, with warranty of advowson, of a moiety of the church in Sedbergh in Lonsdale, Yorkshire, from Thomas Harrington, esquire, the son of Sir William Harrington, to Cuthbert, the abbot of Coverham, and the convent of Coverham.⁵⁴ Early in 1435, along with Sir Nicholas Radcliffe, he testified under oath at Carlisle before William Laton, the escheator for Cumberland, regarding the inquisition *post mortem* on Sir Peter Tilliol, whose daughter and coheir had married Sir Christopher Moresby, a close friend and later in-law of Parr’s.⁵⁵ In 1437 Sir John de Lamplogh (or Lamplugh) granted to his grandson, John, certain lands and tenements in Preston. Parr, who also held land in Preston, witnessed the grant, together with Richard Musgrave and Sir Thomas Strickland. On 11 August 1446, Parr, Strickland, Nicholas Leyburne and Robert Bellingham witnessed a grant of certain Westmorland lands by Thomas Gate and Robert Preston to Edward Beetham. Beetham held from Parr the manor of Beetham and other lands, worth approximately £40 a year.⁵⁶

In June 1452, Parr acted as trustee for Roland Lenthale, taking livery with the other trustees of one-third of the manors of High Roding, Over Shamall and Ginge Margaret in Essex, previously granted to the trustees to uses by Lenthale, who held the manors in right of his wife Margaret, the sister and coheir of Thomas, Earl of Arundel, with reversion to Edmund Lenthale, her son.⁵⁷ This shows Parr’s sphere of interest extended as far south as Essex and that, as a man of known reputation and influence, he was sought by residents of

at least four shires as a witness or trustee. At the local level Parr's position was unassailable as the holder of a large and concentrated estate with a monopoly of shire offices and commissions and one whom the Nevilles regarded with favour. At the national level however his influence was limited to the House of Commons where his initiation was made – in a somewhat unfortunate manner.

As indicated by the sudden increase in disputed elections during the years 1427 to 1429, the statutes governing parliamentary elections were at this time widely abused, due to fraudulent sheriffs, ineligible electors and falsely-returned knights. In 1429 Parliament was originally summoned to meet at Westminster on 13 October. The electors for Cumberland met at a shire court in Carlisle on 30 August and duly elected Sir William Legh and Thomas de la More as that shire's representatives. The date for the opening of Parliament was subsequently brought forward to 22 September and a new summons issued. As there was no regular meeting of the shire court between the receipt of this summons and the opening of the session, the sheriff, Sir Christopher Moresby,⁵⁸ took it upon himself to make out a new return for the altered date, naming More and Thomas Parr as knights of the shire "in an apparently normally attested indenture".⁵⁹ The reaction was immediate. On 28 September, by royal letters patent, a full investigation was ordered into the sheriff's actions, the date and place of the first valid election and the second unilateral one, the names of the electors and any other facts regarding the dispute. The first investigation was inactive or inadequate and a new one was ordered the following year on 10 July. There is no proof one way or another indicating whether or not Thomas Parr took his seat, but in all probability he did not. However, it was such disputed elections which engendered the Parliamentary Statute of 1429.

Of twenty parliaments covering the years 1439-83, in fifteen returns or partial returns available for Westmorland, eleven returns were made either of a Parr or by a Parr as sheriff in charge of the election. Disregarding the disputed election of 1429, Sir Thomas himself sat in six parliaments – 1435, 1445-46, 1449, 1450-51, 1455-56 and 1459. He represented Westmorland in 1435, 1449, 1450-51, 1455-56 and probably 1459 as well. In 1445-46 he sat for Cumberland. Of the remaining three extant returns, some person connected with the Parrs was either sheriff or returned as knight of the shire in at least two. Combined with Neville patronage, this gave the Parrs a forty-four-year hegemony over Westmorland representation in parliament. The Cumberland elections show a more limited involvement. From 1439-83, seventeen returns or partial returns are available, seven with a Parr directly involved and two with a close friend or relative. This close involvement in parliamentary elections and attendance was to give the Parrs a place near the centre of political events for over forty years.

It was during the 1440s that Sir Thomas evolved a contrivance which he and his sons systematically exploited during this forty-four-year period. It was designed to circumvent the statute which ruled that a sheriff of a county could not be elected by that county to serve in parliament. When Lord Clifford was attainted in 1461 and lost his hereditary shrievalty, the Parrs took over the office on an hereditary basis. Sir Thomas, undoubtedly with Neville backing, having obtained the office of sheriff in one county, proceeded to serve as knight of the shire for another. This device was exploited by the three Parrs, Sir Thomas and his sons, Sir William and Sir John, in the parliaments of 1445-46, 1463-65, 1472-75 and 1478. As the interests of the two shires, Westmorland and Cumberland, were closely allied, and as the Parrs themselves had interests in both, they thus managed to integrate the key positions of the two to provide themselves with an unshakeable hold on the northwest.

In the late 1450s, growing violence between the rival houses of York and Lancaster became acute. The Yorkists, facing indictments by the council held at Coventry on 24 June 1459, prepared to take a military stand against their enemies. The Earl of Salisbury, with his northern retainers, marched south to rendezvous with the Duke of York at Ludlow. When the Queen's forces intercepted Salisbury's at Blore Heath in Shropshire on 23 September, the outcome was indecisive. Salisbury rallied his men and, joining forces with York and Warwick, turned to face the royal army at Ludford Bridge near Ludlow. Sir Thomas Parr and several others came to the Earl, not the Duke, to "offer their services".⁶⁰ Even at this late date, however, Parr considered himself a Salisbury supporter, not a "Yorkist". The Yorkists were out-numbered and were routed on 12-13 October and Parr almost certainly fled with Salisbury, arriving, by way of Devon, at Calais on 2 November. All were subsequently attainted of high treason and all their lands and goods declared forfeit.⁶¹ By December 1460 the Crown began to grant Parr's estates away,⁶² but the triumph of Edward IV reversed the process, and it is hardly likely that, in only a year and a half, Parr's lands suffered too much damage.

Sir Thomas Parr's position before July 1459 is somewhat anomalous. Superficially he was a loyal subject of the Crown, continuing to serve on government-appointed commissions and displaying no overtly rebellious tendencies. McFarlane includes him in a group of "later Yorkists whose attitude in 1450 cannot be presumed . . .".⁶³ The wedge, which finally separated Parr from his allegiance to Henry VI, was his personal commitment to Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury. In 1420 Henry V had chosen Salisbury for the office of Warden of the West March, an office not merely lucrative but permitting its holder to raise a substantial private army "among the best natural source of fighting men in the country".⁶⁴ The Earl of Salisbury's enormous income and his friendly relations with the King's council were potent inducements for ambitious northerners like Parr to become his supporters and retainers. Nor was it only Salisbury's position as Warden which attracted Parr, it was also the fact that in 1444 he had been made steward of the Richmond Fee. This brought Salisbury into personal proximity with Parr of Kendal and offered a welcome opportunity for each man to make use of the other's support for the mutual benefit of both.

In all likelihood, Parr's assumption of Salisbury's patronage must have occurred between 1435, when he opposed Salisbury's retainers, the Thornboroughs, in the Crackenthorpe case and 1438, when he received the Richmond Fee leasehold, possibly through Salisbury's intervention. Some sort of relationship, however, predates even 1435, for as early as 1430 Parr, together with the Earl of Salisbury, his supporter William Fitz-Hugh and Thomas Tunstall, were co-witnesses of a quit-claim.⁶⁵ Two other close supporters of the Nevilles, Christopher Conyers and Christopher Boynton, were also co-witnesses, as was James Strangways,⁶⁶ Justice of the Common pleas. Many of these commissions on which Parr served were headed by Salisbury.⁶⁷ Yet, despite his Neville sympathies and two decades of mutual support, Parr was cautious. He did not appear among the anti-Somerset partisans at the first battle of St Albans (22 May 1455), nor, seemingly, did he take any irrevocable anti-Lancastrian action until the day he arrived at Ludlow to offer Salisbury his services. Barely a month later, he was an attainted traitor in exile. He must have wished often during those months that he had remained cautious and delayed a little longer. As things turned out, he had made the right decision after all. In 1460 Parr fought beside Salisbury and York at Wakefield. In the battle and the executions which followed, York, his son the Earl of Rutland, and Salisbury died. On three of the four

lists of the slain found in later sources the name of Sir Thomas Parr appears.⁶⁸ Supposedly, his head was impaled above the gates of York. Parr, however, outlived his reported death by another year. In the series of battles which followed Wakefield, no mention of him has survived, and he may have been in all or none of them. He had, however, acquitted himself sufficiently well to earn the new king, Edward IV's, personal gratitude and favour. The wardship of John Hotham was the first of a series of grants which were to increase the Parr holdings and income vastly during Edward's reign. For ten more years, the Parrs supported the Nevilles, in the person of the Earl of Warwick. But just as the good lordship of Salisbury had succeeded that of Lancaster, so the patronage of a king was to prove more desirable than that of his overmighty subject.

Sir Thomas Parr's personal life was as full as his public one. He had not followed his paternal forebears in the pursuit of an eligible heiress. He had married Alice Tunstall, the daughter of his guardian, Sir Thomas Tunstall of Thurland Castle, Lancashire.⁶⁹ Alice, although from an important family, was no heiress. However, in 1427, her brother, Sir Thomas Tunstall, the younger, married Alianore Fitz-Hugh, widow of Sir Philip Darcy of Knaith, thus bringing Thomas Parr into contact with the Fitz-Hugh family, which, by marriage in the next generation, would provide the Parrs with a claim to the lands of the Fitz-Hugh lords of Ravensworth. Parr's eldest son, William, was born in 1434, and his second son, John, in 1438. The Parrs ultimately had nine children, three sons, William, John and Thomas, and six daughters, Anne, Mabel, Margaret, Agnes, Elizabeth and Alianore. They all made advantageous matches and Parr could number among his sons-in-law such northern notables as Humphrey, Lord Dacre of Gilsland, Sir Thomas Strickland and Sir Christopher Moresby.⁷⁰ The Tunstall connection, despite its paucity of tangible assets, nevertheless proved valuable some sixty years later when Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of Durham, took very seriously his cousinly duty to befriend and advise the widowed Lady Maud Parr.

By Sir Thomas's death, between mid-November and 4 December 1461, the Parrs had risen in less than a century from a position as all but landless retainers in the household of the Duke of Lancaster to a place as prominent landholders among the Westmorland gentry. Sir Thomas had expanded his grandfather's influence by securing a monopoly of the north-western shrievalties, as well as the shire seats in parliament. By 1461, when Sir Thomas and his family's contribution to the Yorkist cause was about to launch the Parrs into the court circle, Sir Thomas Parr's position in Westmorland was paramount and unassailable. He had emerged from the mass of local gentry to stand alone as the man of power in Kendal. There were men with nobler titles, who held land and influence in the north, but in Kendal they exercised their influence through Parr. The last Lancastrian king had offered very little to Parr as an inducement for support. With the accession of the house of York, the Parrs became royal favourites. The change in administration meant for Thomas Parr a broadening of prospects and opportunities, and, although he did not live long enough to take full benefit of these, his sons enjoyed an enviable position as intimates of Edward IV until their deaths. The eldest son, William, was made a Knight of the Garter, an honour commemorated on his fine altar-tomb in the Parr Chapel of Kendal parish church. And his grandson, another Sir Thomas, was not only controller to Henry VIII but father of that monarch's last wife – Katherine.

References

- ¹ Sidney Armitage-Smith, *Register*, i, 79, and *Issue Roll of Thomas de Brantingham, 1370*, ed. F. Devon, 119; also, Marjorie A. Rowling, "William de Parr, King's Knight to Henry IV (1350-1404)", *CW2*, lvi, 1957.
- ² *CPR, 1405-1408*, 406, and *CCR, 1405-1409*, 412.
- ³ *CFR, 1405-1413*, 111.
- ⁴ John Merbury was "sometime Chief Justice in South Wales", and he died in 1437/8. Bodleian: Rawlinson MS. B33.15.
- ⁵ PRO: *Early Chancery Proceedings*, quoted *CW2*, ix, 39.
- ⁶ *CPR, 1413-1416*, 57.
- ⁷ The bulk of the de Roos-Parr lands fell within the parish of Kendal, although segments were scattered throughout the other parishes of southern Westmorland. There was a substantial number of burgage tenements (46) in the town of Kendal itself as well as some holdings in Cumberland, mostly near Carlisle. To these the first William Parr added his rather meagre Lancashire holdings. Altogether the Parr holdings in Westmorland in 1390 consisted of 46 tenements, 12 manors and lands in some thirteen hamlets.
- ⁸ *CPR, 1429-1436*, 144-5.
- ⁹ *CFR, 1430-1433*, 279.
- ¹⁰ *VCH, Lancashire*, iii, 379.
- ¹¹ *CPR, 1432-1461*, 18.
- ¹² *CFR, 1437-1445*, 74.
- ¹³ *ibid.*, 74.
- ¹⁴ E. F. Jacob, *The Fifteenth Century*, 376.
- ¹⁵ Based on percentages indicated by *IPM 12 Edward IV, #49*. Also, summarized by William Farrer, *Records Relating to the Barony of Kendal*, I, 50-2.
- ¹⁶ *CFR, 1437-1445*, 316.
- ¹⁷ Farrer, *Records*, I, 42.
- ¹⁸ *CFR, 1405-1413*, 227.
- ¹⁹ *Cal. IPM*, 1 Henry IV (1413), 3.
- ²⁰ *Cal. IPM*, 12 Henry VI (1434), 3.
- ²¹ *CPR, 1429-1436*, 626; *CPR, 1436-1441*, 592; *CPR, 1452-1461*, 680.
- ²² *CPR, 1461-1467*, 562.
- ²³ *CPR, 1429-1436*, 359-60; *CPR, 1436-1441*, 88; *CPR, 1446-1452*, 238.
- ²⁴ *CPR, 1461-1467*, 66.
- ²⁵ *CFR, 1430-1437*, 259.
- ²⁶ *CPR, 1452-1461*, 435.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 409.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 651.
- ²⁹ *CPR, 1461-1467*, 34.
- ³⁰ *CFR, 1405-1413*, 305.
- ³¹ PRO: *Lists and Indexes*, ix, List of sheriffs for England and Wales, 151.
- ³² Jacob, *op. cit.*, 448-52, for a discussion of the office of sheriff.
- ³³ *CW2*, xxx, 71.
- ³⁴ Jacob, *op. cit.*, 459.
- ³⁵ R. L. Storey, *The End of the House of Lancaster*, 120.
- ³⁶ *CW2*, xxx, 71. Salisbury secured a pardon for the Thornboroughs in 1442/3.
- ³⁷ *Rot. Parl.*, vi, 63.
- ³⁸ Daniel Scott, *The Stricklands of Sizergh Castle, Westmorland*, 64.
- ³⁹ Frederick W. Ragg, "De Threlkeld", *CW2*, xxiii, 154-206.
- ⁴⁰ In 1310, William de Roos held the mastership of the leper hospital of St. Leonard near Kendal Castle in his gift. It was worth £8. 13s. 4d. in that year and was inherited by William's son and heir, Thomas, who on his death in 1390 controlled the advowson which was extended yearly to 40s.
- ⁴¹ Farrer, *Records*, I, 181.
- ⁴² PRO: *Early Chancery Proceedings*, C1/10/83.
- ⁴³ *CW2*, liii, 77.

⁴⁴ *Rot. Parl.* dates this parliament 1444, on the old habit of beginning the year in March. In fact, it was summoned for Feb. 1445 and, after divers prorogations, not dissolved until April 1446. (*Handbook of British Chronology*, 1900, F. M. Powicke and E. B. Fryde (eds.), 530-1.)

⁴⁵ *Rot. Parl.*, v, 168-70.

⁴⁶ Robert Dickenson, Thomas Strickland of Brantridge and John Selyngier of Shoote, Devon.

⁴⁷ *Rot. Parl.*, v, 168-70.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, v, 111.

⁴⁹ A. Luders, *Statutes of the Realm*, II, 286. Another statute, passed in 7 Edward II, forbade members to come armed to parliament (*ibid.*, I, 170).

⁵⁰ *Rot. Parl.*, v, 111.

⁵¹ Indeed, as early as 11 Aug. 1446, Thomas Parr and Robert Bellingham were co-witnesses to a grant of land in Westmorland. (Farrer, *Records*, II, 228.)

⁵² *Rot. Parl.*, v, 169-70.

⁵³ BM Add. MS 38, 133 f. 151 is a copy of a boundary settlement between Sir Robert Bellingham, his son, Henry, and Sir Thomas Parr and his son, William. It concerns land held in Strickland Roger in the township of Strickland Ketel. It is a later copy of an earlier document of the mid-fifteenth century.

⁵⁴ *CCR, 1429-1435*, 50. An interesting facet of this document is that as early as 1430, Parr was involved in transactions in the Sedbergh area. The Fitz-Hughs held land there, which over seventy years later would descend by marriage to the Parrs.

⁵⁵ Unfortunately, the majority of the Tilliol lands had been totally wasted by Scottish depredations. (CW2, xxvi, 409-10.)

⁵⁶ Dodsworth MS 149 f. 144. Quoted in Farrer, *Records*, II, 228.

⁵⁷ *CCR, 1447-1454*, 312.

⁵⁸ The Moresbys and the Parrs had a history of closeness in the fifteenth century, intermarrying in the following generation.

⁵⁹ J. S. Roskell, *The Commons in the Parliament of 1422*, 17.

⁶⁰ C. L. Scofield, *The Life and Reign of Edward IV*, I, 33.

⁶¹ *Rot. Parl.*, v, 348-50.

⁶² A messuage in Prescott, Lancashire, called "Laghoke", of the yearly value of six marks, was granted to Thomas Harper for life. (*CPR, 1452-1461*, 536.)

⁶³ K. B. McFarlane, "The War of the Roses", in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1, 91.

⁶⁴ R. Storey, *Lancaster*, 117.

⁶⁵ That of the church of Sedbergh to the abbot of Coverham, see page 20, above. Also, on 6 May 1430, the same witnesses were used for the grant of the church by Joan and Isabel de Dacre to the abbot. (*CCR, 1402-1405*, 50.)

⁶⁶ Strangeways fought on the Yorkist side at Wakefield. (James Gairdner, *The Paston Letters*, III, 249.)

⁶⁷ On 16 July 1458, Sir Thomas Parr was named to serve under Salisbury in his capacity as warden of the West March and Henry, Earl of Northumberland, warden of the East March, on a commission to treat with the Scots regarding border conditions.

⁶⁸ Edward Hall, *Chronicle*, 250 ("William and Thomas Appare, bothe brethren . . ."); John Stow, *Annales*, 684; *Anglicarum Annales Rerum*, 771.

⁶⁹ *VCH, Lancashire*, viii, 232, and CW2, xxvi, 295-304.

⁷⁰ Mabel Parr married Humphrey, Lord Dacre of Gilsland. Anne Parr married William Harrington of Wresham, Cartmel and Furness. Agnes Parr married Sir Thomas Strickland of Sizergh Castle. Elizabeth Parr married Sir Christopher Moresby of Scaleby Castle. Margaret Parr married Thomas Radcliffe of Derwentwater and Crosthwaite. Alianore Parr married Sir Henry Agard.

