

THE CURZONS OF FIFTEENTH-CENTURY DERBYSHIRE

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Apart from a few monographs written around the turn of this century, little has been produced in the way of gentry family histories covering the later middle ages. This situation needs to be rectified if the nature of power and social organization within county society is to be understood. To talk of a typical gentry family of the fifteenth century is impossible as firstly, each family is unique and secondly, the term 'gentry' covers everyone from knights wealthier than some of the nobility to gentlemen poorer than many prosperous yeomen or burgesses. Yet it is possible to identify a definite social group from which the majority of the important county officials was drawn. The Curzons belonged to this group. They are also a family upon whose genealogy there has been much speculation, though little agreement.

A major difficulty facing the medieval historian and the genealogist is the habit of parents naming their offspring, especially eldest sons or daughters, after themselves. That Christian names run in families is beyond doubt and they can often indicate personal, dynastic or political connections. However, a string of Thomases, Richards or Williams within a family poses identification problems, with fathers becoming confused with sons, brothers with uncles or other brothers, or one branch of a family with another. Whole generations can be overlooked or inserted erroneously. With the tendency to accept uncritically genealogies handed down within a family, such errors often find their way into visitations or the works of early antiquarians, surviving to confuse later scholars. Such has been the case with the Curzons of medieval Derbyshire.

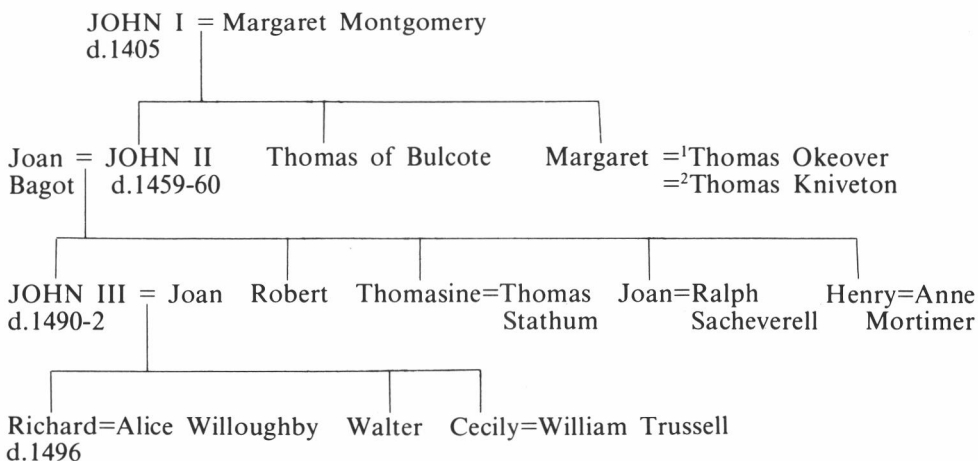
It is to J.C. Wedgwood and his *History of Parliament* that most of the recent difficulties over the Curzons can be traced. He mistakenly identified the John Curzon who sat for Derbyshire occasionally between 1423 and 1446 as of Croxall and Kedleston.¹ A. Compton-Reeves in his study of Stafford family retainers followed Wedgwood, stating that he believed John Curzon of Kedleston to have been the son of John Curzon of Croxall.² In this he presumably assumed that the Curzons, like others among the neighbouring gentry, put the heir to the family estates out on one of their lesser manors during the lifetime of his father. However, such was not the case.

Although they claimed common ancestry of one Giraline de Curcun (a Breton fortune hunter who either accompanied or followed closely on the heels of William the Conqueror), long before the fifteenth century the Curzons of Croxall and those of Kedleston had split into separate families. The early history of the family has been detailed elsewhere³, so I will confine myself to the barest of essentials. At the beginning of the thirteenth century Robert Curzon divided his property between two of his three sons. The elder, Richard, took Croxall, Edingale and Twyford; the younger, Thomas, held Kedleston. The third son, Robert, maximised such opportunities as existed for advancement within the Church, rising to become a cardinal and a confidant of Pope Innocent III before dying in Egypt in 1218.⁴ By the fifteenth century, although the passing of a dozen generations of Curzons had left both family branches firmly embedded in western Derbyshire, they were hardly more than prosperous members of the squirearchy. Indeed, given the duration of their presence in the area and the opportunities for advancement which must have come their way, that they amounted to so little by this time might even be accounted as failure. That is, of course, in as much as any family which maintained both an unbroken male line and its social position can be said to have failed. Moreover, success or failure was often due more to the ability of the

then head of the family than to the more predictable income from the family estates.

As I have used and selected from a variety of proposed genealogies, both ones dealing specifically with the Curzons and others in which they appear occasionally, some explanations and justification of my decisions seems required. Firstly, for the Curzons of Kedleston.

Table 1: Pedigree of the Fifteenth Century Curzons of Kedleston



Although not all proposed genealogies included dates, only that of Pilkington⁵ dissented from the opinion that John Curzon I (died 1405) was succeeded by his son John II (died 1460), called the 'white haired' and married to Joan Bagot, and that he in turn was succeeded by his son Richard (died 1496) married to Alice Willoughby. Pilkington maintained that Richard had an elder brother, John, who was married to Elizabeth Eyre. I agree with Pilkington in that Richard was not John II's heir, but there was no elder brother. The individual referred to by Pilkington was in fact Richard's son who died in 1512-13. With a succession of identically named heads of the family, 'Richard son and heir of John' becomes confusing. It is not uncommon for a generation to be overlooked by later observers; indeed, it has happened to the Curzons' kinsmen the Bagots of Blithfield (Staffordshire). However, a comparison of probable birthdates reveals that a generation must have existed between John II, who came of age in 1411 and whose brother-in-law was born in 1377, and Richard, who married the sister of Henry Willoughby (born 1451). This theory is supported by a criminal indictment of 1446 against two John Curzons of Kedleston, one 'senior', the other 'junior'; a land grant of April 1472 by John Curzon of Kedleston 'son and heir' of John; and also by the fact that a John Curzon presented to Kedleston church as head of the family in 1462, 1477 and 1485.⁶ It is evident that there was another generation between John II and Richard headed by John Curzon III which has been omitted from earlier genealogies.

Family tradition and various sixteenth and seventeenth-century visitations describe John I as a knight, though there is no other evidence for this. He was nevertheless the most powerful member of either branch of the Curzons during the fifteenth century. Kedleston together with much of western Derbyshire and eastern Staffordshire lay within the Honour of Tutbury in the Duchy of Lancaster. Thus it is hardly surprising to find John as an active supporter of Henry of Lancaster during the troubled opening years of his reign after the deposition of Richard II in 1399. Curzon had been escheator for Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire (which counties were administered together to a great extent at this time) in 1394-5, and had sat in parliament for Derbyshire twice

during Richard II's reign, but it was under Henry IV that he really prospered. Curzon was one of the thirty-five men who attended the new king in parliament in 1399, and was appointed steward of the Honour of Tutbury in the same year.⁷ This appointment, which made Curzon one of the most powerful figures in the north Midlands, was confirmed in 1401, when he was also given the keepership of Horsley and its castle.⁸ In fees alone these appointments were worth £60 a year, to which income should be added an annuity of £20 from the Honour of Tutbury and the many lucrative perquisites such a prominence naturally brought.⁹

Although he was a Derbyshire justice of the peace from 1396, he only became a regular appointee to county commissions after Henry IV's accession. Henry needed such men to maintain law and order. Of particular significance in this were his appearances in 1402 as a commissioner to suppress discontent against the new king and as an arbitrator with Thomas Rempston in a dispute between the burgesses of Leicester and those of Derby and Nottingham over the charging of tolls.¹⁰ Curzon's work for Henry IV in the Midlands was supplemented by other activities. He was a privy councillor from 1401, and both war treasurer and diplomat during the king's early dealings with the Scots.¹¹ Curzon died suddenly at the peak of his influence in the first half of 1405. To the end he remained Henry's 'chier escuier', and the knighthood bestowed upon him by later generations arises from confusion with Sir John Curzon of Essex and East Anglia, who was also prominent at this time.

By his wife, Margaret Montgomery, John Curzon of Kedleston left three children. His heir was John II, who married Joan Bagot; the others were named Thomas and Margaret. That these were the only children seems certain in that Kedleston and Weston Underwood were granted to John II on 11 August 1411 by his father's feoffees with reversion to Thomas and his heirs and the final remainder to Margaret and her heirs should both her brothers die childless.¹² That Margaret was included in this deed indicates that there were no other sons of John Curzon the elder to whom the family estates might pass to prevent their passing out of the family. It seems likely that Margaret was an only daughter. She married Thomas Okeover the younger, the son of the Derbyshire member of parliament for 1407 and 1422. After being widowed in the late 1430s, she took as her second husband the head of another local gentry family, Thomas Kniveton.

Apart from the 1411 reference described above, Thomas Curzon first appears in documents from 1417, including a grant to him of an annual rent of half a mark (6s 8d) from William Curzon of Croxall.¹³ Nine years later he acted with Sir Thomas Blount, Sir Roger Aston, the Gresleys and others as a feoffee to use for his brother, sister and mother over land in Sudbury.¹⁴ Three years later he married the heiress to Bulcote in Nottinghamshire by whom he had a daughter.¹⁵ His wife was also a young widow and must have been a tempting prize for suitors. Settling down on her property, Thomas quickly became a figure of note in local affairs. He sat on the Nottinghamshire bench for long periods (1430-6, 1441-58, 1460-1) and served on Henry IV's commission of array there in December 1459 as civil war was developing. On his death in the early 1460s his estates passed to his son-in-law Alfred Berwick.

With the heads of both the Kedleston and Croxall branches of the Curzon family named John through much of the first half of the fifteenth century, confusion has been common as to who is being referred to in documents in which no *domus* has been appended to the name. However, by comparing the other names and places mentioned in such documents with others in which no problems of identity exist, it has been generally possible to isolate sets of associates for each John Curzon. However, this technique is neither conclusive nor foolproof. For instance, both branches of the Curzons had links with the Gresley family of Drakelow. Indeed, given that they all lived in the same area and moved among the same gentry circles, it would be strange if they did not have friends in common. Nevertheless, in most cases a positive identification can be made.

There are also a few references in which both John Curzon II of Kedleston and his Croxall namesake and contemporary appear. In the list of those liable to pay the 1431

parliamentary subsidy John Curzon of Kedleston is called an esquire, whereas the Croxall one is merely a gentleman.¹⁶ The various classes within medieval society merged into each other (especially financially), though this may be evidence that by the fifteenth century the cadet branch of the family had attained a social superiority over the main line. It was common practice in medieval deeds to list feoffees or witnesses in descending social order, and in a 1447 grant by Sir James Ormond concerning Ashby de la Zouch, which both Curzons witnessed, the name of John of Kedleston preceded that of John of Croxall.¹⁷ The preeminence of the Kedleston branch is also seen in a dispute between the Prior of Repton and John Curzon of Croxall that went to arbitration in January 1441. Each disputant was allowed to choose two arbitrators and Curzon chose his namesake from Kedleston and his own father-in-law, Sir John Gresley.¹⁸ The Croxall man would hardly have chosen a social inferior.

The number of surviving references for John of Kedleston far surpass those for John of Croxall, and though in itself this is of no significance, it does enable a fuller picture of the former to be drawn. Assuming that the 1411 grant of his patrimony mentioned earlier occurred on his coming of age, he was born in 1390. He was returned as a member of parliament for Derbyshire seven times (1423-4, 1429-30, 1432, 1435, 1439-40, 1442, 1445-6), was Derbyshire escheator three times (1430-1, 1435-6, 1440-1), sheriff once (1437-8) and on the county bench from June 1430 until his death thirty years later. In addition, he sat on numerous county commissions. His closest associates seem to have been the Pole family of Hartington, who, like him, used the legal profession rather than court, clerical or military service as a means of advancement. The two families were probably related, if not to each other, then to the Twyfords — considering the frequency with which they occur in that family's deeds.¹⁹ John II of Kedleston's maternal grandmother was an Elizabeth Twyford, and in leases of July 1444 he and Ralph Pole were mentioned as remaindermen for Margery widow of Walter Twyford.²⁰ Curzon also appears regularly in Okeover family documents²¹, as would be expected given the marriage of his sister to Thomas Okeover. His ties with other gentry families in west Derbyshire were strengthened by this sister's second marriage to a Kniveton and by the fact that Henry Bradbourne of Hough married a daughter of Sir John Bagot, as had Curzon himself. He appears to have been greatly in demand as a witness to documents and was a feoffee to use for Nicholas Longford, Joan Clinton, Robert Shaw, and Ralph Shirley — evidence of the respect in which he was held in Derbyshire as a competent administrator and trusted lawyer.²²

It was these qualities which lay behind his seven appearances in parliament rather than any connection with the Stafford family, by whom he had been retained in October 1440. Being retained was more often an acknowledgement of influence rather than a precursor to the same. Curzon had been retained along with many of the other leading gentry figures in the Peak District at this time as part of an attempt by the Staffords to extend their influence into the area, but he was certainly no placeman in Westminster. His position in Derbyshire was an established one before Humphrey Stafford as Earl of Stafford or (from 1444) Duke of Buckingham exercised what little influence was his in that county's affairs.

The later-medieval provincial gentry were not as immobile as has sometimes been thought. Many of them travelled extensively either on their own business or that of a lord whom they served, or in some judicial or administrative capacity. Curzon's numerous visits to parliament must have rendered London almost as familiar to him as his native Derbyshire. Parliament was an occasion for the sharing of news and making of contacts as much as the transaction of governmental business. Curzon also appears in documents recording the sale or 'gift' of goods and chattels by London merchants and tradesmen²³ — evidence of a network of associates and clients in the capital to complement that back at home.

Little is known of his connection with the Duchy of Lancaster. Although his father had been steward for the Honour of Tutbury under Henry IV, the only direct link between the Duchy and John II concerns some lands in Duffield Frith. Other connections might be anticipated. In 1456 Curzon leased Ravensdale and Postern parks

for 21 years at an annual rent of £4 6s 8d.²⁴ Such a lease was obviously a source of considerable profit and may be taken as a sign of favour to him. Whether he was a political partisan or not cannot be deduced from this slight evidence. It is known that he was summoned to the 1455 Great Council and appointed to the Derbyshire commission of array in December 1459 as civil war was developing. Yet, particularly for regular appointees, omissions from commissions in times of political crisis tend to be more significant than inclusions. All that can safely be said is that Curzon was not a known Yorkist. Like the vast majority of his class, he was mainly concerned with the maintenance of law and stability rather than political factionalism.

Much of the troubled history of the Staffordshire-Derbyshire border region during the 1440s and 1450s was the work of dissatisfied young gentlemen. A feature of the disturbances was a series of attacks on the Blount family. John Curzon II took no part in these, though others from Kedleston including his younger son Henry did. On 28 April 1455 Henry was indicted with others for the murder of Roland Blount by a blow to the head at Derby seventeen days earlier. He denied the charge.²⁵ As with so many other medieval lawsuits, the final verdict is unknown. However, since Henry, as bailiff of Burton-on-Trent for the Duchy of Lancaster, appears as a co-feoffee with the Blounts for the Chamber family in 1465, it is reasonable to suppose that either the charge was unfounded or everything had been settled by then.²⁶ He was still alive in the late 1470s.

The importance of the Duchy in the lives of the local gentry was immense, and the links between it and both branches of the Curzon family were lasting ones. The Duchy needed gentlemen to administer its property and courts, while the rich, easy pickings among its offices held an understandable attraction for such men. On the death of John Curzon II in 1460, he was succeeded by his son John III, a man approaching middle age and already married with children. John III was appointed to commissions to arrest various members of the staunchly pro-Lancastrian Vernon family in July 1461, and five months later was rewarded with the Duchy offices of parker and receiver of Postern (where his father had leased land).²⁷ Yet this is not evidence that he held Yorkist sympathies. The Curzons, like most of the local gentry, had maintained a state of masterly inactivity confident that an early political commitment to the ultimately-successful faction would not be necessary for them to share in the available local patronage. There was enough for all save the politically rash.

Especially after 1399, with the incorporation of the Duchy of Lancaster into the Crown (though it was still administered separately), central control of the land became increasingly impersonal. Whatever loyalty such Duchy men as John Curzon I had acquired had been to individuals. By the mid-fifteenth century what remained was merely an institutional overlord, a fact which helps to explain the unsuccessful attempts of the Crown and nobility to draw the local gentry to their war-banners. In the 1460s when George, duke of Clarence attempted to assert a renewed personal influence over the Honour of Tutbury, he only ever won over men's heads not their hearts; and it was their hearts he needed to mould an affinity into a retinue. There is no evidence that John III ever followed Clarence into revolt or battle. However, the ties between them grew closer with time. Curzon's appointment as sheriff of Derbyshire in 1472-3 suggests the Duke's influence, as does Richard Curzon's as escheator the following term. John III was also a household man of Clarence and keeper of Worcester castle (a sinecure) under him.²⁸ Yet Curzon was wise enough to avoid becoming so closely involved with this vain, ambitious and not particularly astute magnate that he fell from grace with his patron.

Although never as prominent as his father, John III was not without respect or ability. On 11 August 1473 he and his close friend Nicholas Fitzherbert arbitrated in a property dispute between Nicholas Montgomery and the Agard family.²⁹ All involved had links with the Honour of Tutbury, and it is possible that John's wife was also a Fitzherbert. He was appointed to the Derbyshire bench in 1475 (significantly after the eclipse of Clarence's power) and stayed thereupon until his death. The last record of him is dated 12 January 1492.³⁰ He was certainly dead by 16 April 1492, being

succeeded by his son Richard.³¹

A Curzon was also sheriff of Derbyshire in 1486-7. Most sources think that it was John III and indeed at Michaelmas 1486 Henry VII did send a reward of £100 to John Curzon sheriff.³² However, the Fine Rolls record both the appointment of Richard Curzon as sheriff on 5 November 1486 and his handing over of the shrievalty at the end of his year in office. It is even possible that one of the Croxall Curzons was the sheriff in question as that family had followed Henry to Bosworth, and having trustworthy sheriffs was of prime importance to the new and insecure king.

Richard Curzon, John III's son and heir was born around 1435-40 and married into the Willoughby family of Wollaton in Nottinghamshire. The only public office he is certainly known to have held was the Derbyshire escheatorship for 1473-4. Two earlier references which may apply to him are a mention in the receiver-general's account of Humphrey, duke of Buckingham for 1456-7 in which a Richard Curzon receives £4 (this fits in with his grandfather's Stafford link), and the inclusion of a 'Sir' Richard Curzon on the jury in the Inquisition *post mortem* of Sir Humphrey Stafford of Hook in October 1472.³³ That Richard lacked the prominence in Derbyshire affairs of his forebears owes something to the longevity of his father and still more to his marriage, which drew him to Nottinghamshire. The following legal declaration from around 1480 reveals Curzon and John Strelley (both of whom had married sisters of Sir Henry Willoughby) closely attached to the Willoughby family's household during a feud with Edward Grey, Lord Lisle:

'Richard Wodborn, servant to the Lourd Gray, come to Wollaton on horsbak, with a longe speyr in his hand and oon man with hym, and inquired for Sir Herre Willoby to have spoken with hym, seyinge thies wordes to Richard Cursun: "If he be with in bid hym come out and speyk with me." And when he understond that he was not with in, he departed (Moreover) John Strilley, Thomas Thurlond, and Richard Cursone were not at Tauton the xxv day of February last past, for Strilley and Cursone were with My Lady Willoby that dey.'³⁴

Other witnesses backed up this statement, denying that Curzon was actively involved in the troubles at Toton and Mansfield on that February date between Willoughby and Grey. However, the Willoughby-Curzon link is undeniable, and it is significant that while a Curzon was sheriff of Derbyshire in 1486-7, Willoughby held the same post in Staffordshire.

Both light and confusion emerge from the Inquisition *post mortem* of Richard Curzon. The original return no longer survives, but that of a second inquisition held on 30 March 1507 does.³⁵ It declares that Richard held through his feoffees Kedleston and the hamlet of Weston Underwood jointly with his widowed mother. Richard is said to have died on 26 July 1500 and Joan on 12 July 1506. Joan held half of these lands for life with reversion to Richard and his heirs, and it seems that the reason for this second inquisition arose out of some dispute concerning these dower lands after her death. However, the date given here for Richard's death is inaccurate, suggesting that even in the early sixteenth century confusion existed between the two Curzon branches. The person who died in 1500 was John Curzon III of Croxall. A plaque, now removed from Richard's tomb, gave his date of demise as 3 August 1496, which fits in better with the issue of a writ of *diem clausit extremum* for him on 15 July 1497, ordering the initial Inquisition *post mortem*.

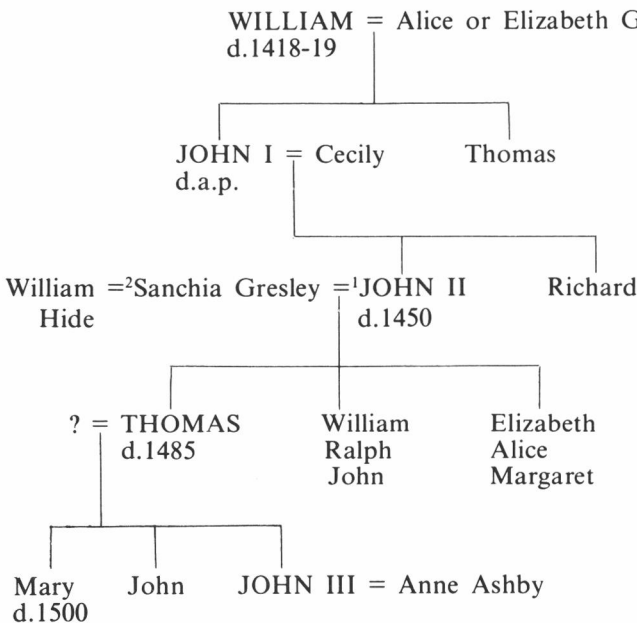
There remains one further loose end to tie up before this part of the study is completed. In the Curzon genealogy on the walls of Kedleston House and repeated in the family's entry in Burke's peerage a Richard Curzon is inserted between John I and John II. There are indeed numerous references to a Richard Curzon in the early part of Henry VI's reign, but nothing to connect him with Derbyshire. The Curzon claimed by Kedleston is in fact from Warwickshire and Worcestershire, though his pedigree is unknown. When he married in 1423 an impressive number of leading gentry from those counties entered into recognizances (presumably as feoffees to use) that he and his wife Isabel should have a good estate of lands worth £40 annually.³⁶ He was a Beauchamp servant and retainer, serving Richard earl of Warwick as his chamberlain, as under-sheriff of Worcestershire 1424-6, and finally as an executor in 1439. He may have been

married to a lady called Margaret initially, but Isabel was certainly a good catch as a wife — she had been a lady-in-waiting to Henry V’s bride, Queen Catherine. All things considered, the social status and connections of these Curzons were such that the total lack of references to them in Croxall or Kedleston deeds can only be satisfactorily explained by concluding that they were not from these branches. Richard had a considerable military career in France, with his positions of authority becoming increasingly exalted with experience. He was captain of Sandgate in 1432, of Honfleur in 1441 and lieutenant of Rouen by 1449.³⁷ Richard seems to have been killed at or shortly after the fall of Rouen in November 1449. His pension from the Crown was stopped in 1450.

That this Richard does not appear in any of the Tudor or Stuart visitations prompts speculation that a later event (such as the building of the present Kedleston Hall at the beginning of George III’s reign) led to a renewed genealogical interest, and that coming across references to this Richard Curzon in Dugdale’s famous work on Warwickshire, someone slipped him into the family tree.

There is less to write concerning the Curzons of Croxall. Croxall itself lies just inside Staffordshire, consisting of the hall, the church and a few farms.³⁸ Fortunately, a greater degree of agreement exists among earlier writers as to this branch’s genealogy.

Table 2: Pedigree of the Fifteenth Century Curzons of Croxall



The only problem concerns the father of John II of Croxall. However, this is sorted out when one realizes that John II’s father, John I, died young and during his own father’s lifetime. Thus it was William Curzon, his grandfather, whom John II succeeded. William was born in the mid-fourteenth century and is known to have been in royal service by the late 1380s. He was granted custody of the Grimeshull family estates near Coleshill in north Warwickshire in June 1387. Under Richard II and Henry IV he served as a yeoman in the royal household, collecting fees and favours there.³⁹ Like his kinsmen from Kedleston, it was through the Duchy of Lancaster that he acquired a measure of distinction. To this should be added considerable personal ability and the importance of his kinship connections. The marriage of his grandson, John II,

into the powerful Gresleys of Drakelow, and a close relationship with the Blounts of Elvaston linked the Croxall Curzons with two of the most prominent families in the area. There is also indication that he used his 'cousin' John I of Kedleston as a feoffee to use for Croxall.⁴⁰ From 1410 until his death William sat upon the Derbyshire commission of the peace, but was never heavily engaged in local politics. The latest reference to him dates from 10 October 1418 when he was serving with Henry V (as a Duchy of Lancaster man) at Rouen during that king's French campaign. He died sometime during the following seven months, for in April 1419 his widow successfully sued for dower.

Like many younger sons, it was to the Church that Thomas, brother of John I, looked for a career. As an eighteen year-old clerk of the diocese of Lichfield, he was granted papal dispensation to hold a benefice without cure of souls in July 1413.⁴¹ By the time of his father's death Thomas was rector of Pikelwell (Leicestershire) where the Curzons held land. Although excluded by John II from the bulk of the family inheritance, there is evidence that he shared in the administration of this during the young heir's minority. He was the Curzon of Croxall representative in 1419 amongst the Montgomery feoffees for a small piece of land called Croxaleholme, as his father had been in Richard II's reign.⁴² It may well be that he was able to secure for himself a share of his father's property through his position in the period before John II came of age. For in the earlier part of the century the Curzons of Croxall had inherited some Brabazon family lands including Mowsley (Leicestershire) which Thomas was occupying in 1428 with John II's permission, and Sibbertoft (Northamptonshire), the royal serjeantry of which place Thomas still held when an old man in 1450.⁴³ It is not unreasonable to assume that he took for his own this whole portion of the Curzon estates, leaving to his nephew the remaining lands in Derbyshire and Staffordshire.

In his early years as head of the family John II had frequent recourse to litigation. After his grandmother had successfully sued for dower lands in 1419, he sued William Bushbury in an obscure little case for the custody of the two coheiresses of Thomas Blyth, and was in turn sued by Elizabeth Berkeley for beating up her servant Hugh Shepherd. After this his time spent serving with the Duke of Bedford in France in the mid-1420s must have seemed like a rest and cure.⁴⁴

During the following decade John II became embroiled in a protracted struggle with John Wilne, prior of nearby Repton over land and tithes. Several years later Curzon claimed that priory animals had been depastured on his close at Oklee for six years from 18 June 1436 causing £20 worth of damages. That the cattle should have grazed there for so long indicates that this was no case of accidental straying. Beneath everything lay a dispute over common pasture and customary rights, which Curzon was attempting to flout. In 1429 he had consolidated his landholdings in Croxall by buying land there from Sir Richard Vernon and now, in an attempt to increase his income, he was enclosing land to the prior's 'disherytaunce' and 'dayley oppresses ye saide prior' and tenants — according to two petitions to Chancery of around 1438.⁴⁶ All this Curzon denied and the struggle dragged on without solution. In November 1440 he was ordered to be arrested, but two months later things had cooled down sufficiently for arbitration (mentioned earlier) to be arranged. I am doubtful as to the success of the arbitration though little more is known of the dispute. As a means of settling differences arbitration was common in this area of the north Midlands and around this time Curzon was again forced to agree to it in a possibly similar dispute with the tenants of Sir John Griffith at Edingale.⁴⁷ With arbitration by Sir Richard Vernon and Sir Thomas Blount this was an all Duchy of Lancaster affair. Again the outcome is unknown.

Little can be gleaned from evidence as to his political sympathies. His closest associates such as the Gresleys, Mountforts, Sir William Peyto and William Lucy, had connections with both the Staffords and Beauchamp/Neville Earls of Warwick. His executors were Sir Thomas Blount, Sanchia his widow, his sons Thomas and William (and, added later, Robert Foulshurst); Thomas Stanley and John Gresley witnessed his will. He looked to the Duchy of Lancaster, while maintaining a loose link with

Warwick. He was appointed with other Duchy stalwarts in 1446 to inquire into the property and heir of the late Richard Delves.⁴⁶

Before his death John II settled some of the family property in Alrewas (Staffordshire) on his younger brother Richard in return for 'a parcell of a notable summe of money' and on condition that Richard 'bylde an halle over his owne costages a cordyng to the chambur that nowe stondes ther and also a croschambur att the west eynd of the seyde halle.'⁴⁷ This is hardly the most generous of settlements, though Richard agreed to it — probably through lack of any real alternative. After John II's death on 4 April 1450 his will, proved at Leicester 19 May 1450, revealed more settlements. Two unmarried daughters were to have dowries of £20 each; another daughter (presumably married) received a sum of ten marks; two servants each received a horse; a couple of younger sons, William and Ralph, were granted a life interest in the family lands at Streethay-by-Lichfield; and his widow Sanchia was to hold Croxall and Pikewell (Leicestershire). At his death his eldest son, Thomas, was still a minor and Sanchia looked after the family inheritance, though she was unable to get all her dower lands conveyed to her.

The young Thomas Curzon was soon at the centre of a dispute. Edward Lord Grey of Groby quickly claimed the boy's wardship and marriage. However, Sanchia and her Gresley relations had no intention of letting Thomas slip into Grey's hands and hid him away.⁴⁸ This early excitement apart, most of Thomas' life seems to have been spent in quiet obscurity judging from the scant surviving evidence concerning him. He attained his majority sometime in the mid-1450s and married one Margaret Hartington, about whom nothing is known. In the later 1460s Thomas was sued by the Steward of the Duchy of Lancaster, George duke of Clarence, for poaching in Duchy lands (a common pursuit of the Derbyshire gentry) with the Stanleys, John Gresley, Henry Curzon of Kedleston and others. Such an offence and prosecution did not affect his dealings with the Duchy and in 1479 he and his son, John III, were retained by Clarence's successor William Lord Hastings. In 1482 John III was married to Anne, daughter of the Leicestershire gentleman William Ashby. Her dowry of 200 marks would seem to indicate that the Curzons of Croxall were increasing in importance. Hastings was attempting to forge a powerful affinity in Derbyshire and the Curzons with other local families were the medium through which that nobleman's power was exercised. Thomas was killed in 1485 at the battle of Bosworth fighting for Henry Tudor, against Hastings' executioner.

Thomas had three children, two of whom died in infancy. His line was continued by the third, John III. John died comparatively young in 1500, without holding any public office unless he was the Northamptonshire escheator 1496-7. It is not even possible to be certain who among the major local gentry families were his close associates, because of the uncertain date of death of his more prominent namesake from the Kedleston branch of the family.

Both the Croxall and Kedleston Curzons were families who made their mark on gentry society through public service. Unlike similarly long-established local families, such as the Vernons, and the Blounts, the Curzons lacked extensive landholdings to foster any major degree of domination within Derbyshire. Their advance (and this is especially true of the Kedleston branch) was through personal ability, making use of the contacts such a quality brought, and the families into which they married. The success of relying on personal qualities for advancement depended on the calibre of successive heads of the family, for few outside of the nobility could expect as of right to have a place in county administration and government.

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- ⁵ J. Pilkington, *A View of the Present State of Derbyshire*, (Derby, 1789), II, 131-2.
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- ⁷ J.H. Wylie, *History of England under Henry the Fourth*, (London, 1884-98), IV, 142-3; R. Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster*, (London, 1953), I, 539.
- ⁸ *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1399-1402, 368; *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, (H.M.S.O., 1968), VII, 1399-1422, 35.
- ⁹ PRO, Duchy of Lancaster, Accounts various, DL28/27/5 m.1. This was by no means the largest annuity paid by Henry IV to the gentry in this area. I think it predates 1399.
- ¹⁰ *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1401-05, 89, 129.
- ¹¹ J. Strachy and others (eds.), *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, (London, 1767-77), III, 530; Wylie, *op.cit.*, I, 191.
- ¹² Jeayes, *op.cit.*, no.1505.
- ¹³ Kent Record Office (cited as KRO), U269/T146/E. This is a bundle of eighteen documents.
- ¹⁴ Derbyshire Record Office (cited as DRO), D410 (uncatalogued).
- ¹⁵ R. Thoroton, *The Antiquities of Nottinghamshire*, (Nottingham, 1790-6), III, 24-5. See also PRO, Early Chancery Proceedings, C1/16/244, 633.
- ¹⁶ *Inquisitions and Assessments relating to Feudal Aids, A.D. 1284-1431*, (London, 1899-1921), I, 272-310. See also *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1441-46, 462-3.
- ¹⁷ *Historical Manuscripts Commission*, Series 78 (Hastings), I, 1-2.
- ¹⁸ *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1435-41, 461. Wilne chose Sir Richard Vernon and John Pole.
- ¹⁹ DRO, D369G/ZE4; Jeayes, *op.cit.*, no. 1526.
- ²⁰ Jeayes, *op.cit.*, nos.610, 2188.
- ²¹ He witnessed the Okeovers' land transactions in 1439 and 1455 and was one of their feoffees in 1457 - DRO, D231M/T23, T382, E482.
- ²² Jeayes, *op.cit.*, no.1596; *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1447-54, 426-7; DRO D185B/15; Leicestershire Record Office, 26D53/190.
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- ²⁵ G. Wrottesley, 'Extracts from the Plea Rolls of the Reign of Henry VI', *Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, new series III (1900), 223-4.
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- ²⁷ *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1461-67, 31, 81, 135.
- ²⁸ PRO, Writs and Warrants for Issues of the Exchequer, E404/76/4/102; *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1476-85, 118.
- ²⁹ DRO, D410M (uncatalogued). For a full survey of arbitration at this time, including many north Midland examples see I. Rowney, 'Arbitration in Gentry Disputes of the Later Middle Ages', *History*, LXVII (1982), 367-76.
- ³⁰ PRO, KB9/385/19.
- ³¹ *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem - Henry VII*, (HMSO, 1898-1955), III, no.1040.
- ³² PRO, Miscellanea of the Exchequer, E407/6/137 m.4.
- ³³ SRO, D641/1/2/23 m.6; SRO, D(W)1553/97.
- ³⁴ *Historical Manuscripts Commission*, Series 69 (Middleton), 118.
- ³⁵ Cox, *op.cit.*, III, 179; *Calendar of Fine Rolls*, 1485-1509, 245.
- ³⁶ *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1422-29, 127. These feoffees included Sir William Mountfort, Sir Ralph Greystoke, Humphrey Stafford of Grafton, and William Peyto.
- ³⁷ See A.C. Ewald (ed.), 'Calendar of French Rolls Henry VI', *Forty Eighth Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*, (London, 1887), 327, 349, 358. Also *ibid.*, 411 for the presentation of a John Curzon to the church of Oughtingham, Guisnes in March 1455. See also J. Stevenson (ed.), *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Wars of the English in France*, (Rolls Series, 1861-4), I, 498-9, for a letter from Henry VI to Richard Curzon just before the fall of Rouen, thanking him for his services and promising 'you shall be shortly comforted'.

- ³⁸ There are two pertinent articles in the *Transactions of the Lichfield and South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society* mentioning Croxall; J.W. Whiston, 'Croxall, Staffs., an air photograph of a deserted medieval village' in volume VIII (1966-7), and P.V. Bate and D.M. Palliser, 'Suspected lost village sites in Staffordshire' in volume XII (1970-1).
- ³⁹ *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1391-96, 129; PRO, E404/31/396-7.
- ⁴⁰ R. Ussher, *An Historical Sketch of the Parish of Croxall*, (London, 1881), 144.
- ⁴¹ *Calendar of Papal Letters*, VI, 1404-15, 450.
- ⁴² KRO, U269/T146/E.
- ⁴³ Victoria County History of England, *A History of the County of Leicester*, V, 251; *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, V, 174.
- ⁴⁴ KRO, U269/0159/1.
- ⁴⁵ PRO, C1/9/304; C1/39/20.
- ⁴⁶ *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1441-46, 462-3. The others appointed were Sir Thomas Blount, Sir John Griffith, Thomas Everdon, William Cumberford and John Wells.
- ⁴⁷ KRO, 269/T146/F. This is a bundle of six documents. Richard is wrongly called John II's son in that man's will. Noticeably, in that deed (see Ussher, *op.cit.*, 146-7) John inserted a clause concerning who should get the Alrewas property should Richard break the terms of the settlement of 29 July 1448.
- ⁴⁸ Wrottesley, *Plea Rolls*, *op.cit.*, 206. This means that W.H. Dunham's references to the Curzons in 'Lord Hastings' Indentured Retainers', *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, XXXIX (1955), 23n, 143-5 need correction.