

◆ The retirement of Henry Percy, ninth Earl of Northumberland, at Petworth 1621–1632

By Gordon R. Batho

Henry Percy was released from incarceration in the Tower in 1621 by the influence of James Hay, a favourite of King James who had married Lucy, the Earl's younger daughter, against his wishes. He was at first confined to 30 miles from Petworth, but the restriction was later removed. He was not, however, allowed to attend Parliament even when Charles became king. Algernon, his heir, was called as Baron Percy. The Earl lived quietly, often visiting his older daughter Dorothy, wife of Viscount Lisle, and her children at Penshurst. Northumberland died at Petworth on 5 November 1632, the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot which had caused him so much grief, though he was clearly innocent.

Henry Percy, ninth Earl of Northumberland (1564–1632) (Fig. 1) was convicted in Star Chamber in 1606 of misprision (failure to convey prior knowledge) of treason over the Gunpowder Plot. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, fined £30,000, deprived of all his offices including the Captaincy of the Yeomen of the Guard, and incarcerated in the Tower of London until 21 July 1621.¹ The fine was commuted to £11,000 in 1613, largely because of the pleas made by his wife Dorothy (*née* Devereux) who was the widow of Sir Thomas Perrot when he married her in late 1594. The marriage had proved turbulent. In his *Advices to his Son* (first composed in 1595 when Dorothy was pregnant with one of their two sons who died in infancy, and revised in 1609), he expresses his belief that women existed as much for men's vexation as for their happiness.² He had had disagreements with his mother Catherine (*née* Neville), especially after she as a widow married a servant, her Steward Francis Fitton. He quarrelled with his wife notably before they had to live apart anyway, and there was terrible trouble over the marriages of his daughters. Lady Dorothy (born 1598) made a marriage, kept secret from the Earl, in 1616 with Robert Sidney, son and heir to Viscount Lisle. Though it was eminently suitable, the Earl paid a dowry of £6000 only reluctantly in 1618. Dorothy, his favourite, was accomplished and beautiful, but was surpassed by her sister Lucy (born 1600) who was besieged by admirers when she appeared at Court. Despite all that Northumberland did to discourage any match,

even keeping her with him for weeks in the Tower in 1617 'for company', she chose to marry James, Lord Hay, a widower who enjoyed the favour of King James and who was noted for extravagant entertainment. As John Chamberlain, the London gossip, reported to Dudley Carleton, a former comptroller of the Northumberland household, on 8 March 1617, the Earl declared 'he was a Percy, and could not endure that his daughter should dance any Scottish jigs'. Ironically, Lucy's release came through the Countess of Somerset, a fellow prisoner of whom Northumberland was fond. 'Where he thought he had his daughter safest, there he lost her' was Chamberlain's comment. The Earl refused Lucy the £20,000 dowry he had promised if she would be ruled by him. He visited the Countess of Somerset no more.³

Even more ironically, it was Hay's intervention with the king that secured Northumberland's release on 21 July 1621. The Earls of Oxford and Southampton, Sir Henry Yelverton and Sir Edward Sands were released with him. At first he was disinclined to be beholden to his son-in-law, but he yielded. A grand salute of guns was fired to commemorate his departure and it was reported that: 'The warders of the Tower made great moan that they have lost such a benefactor'. Northumberland was escorted to Essex House in the Strand, which he had inherited from his brother-in-law, by James Hay.⁴ The Earl of Arundel supped with him the first night and dined at Syon the next day together with the Spanish Ambassador, who came unbidden, and became affable and familiar

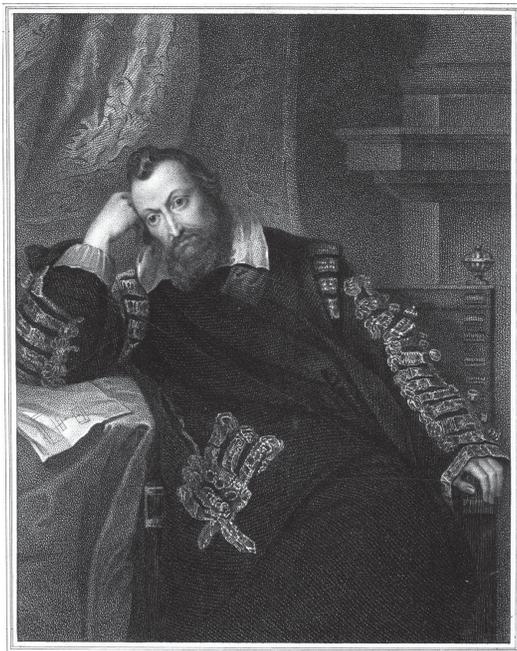


Fig. 1. Henry Percy, ninth Earl of Northumberland (with kind permission of West Sussex Record Office, Ref. PD1324).

with him. On the following Monday the Earl went with him to a common play at the Fortune, Golding Lane, and the players made him a banquet when the play was done in the garden adjoining. Chamberlain reported: 'It was my chance to see him in Paul's churchyard, and in my judgement he is nothing altered from what he was more than "15 years ago".'

The Earl's imprisonment had allowed him the leisure to look to the management of his estates, which he did to great advantage. When he entered the Tower, his income from land (he held land in eight counties of England and Wales) was of the order of £6000 annually. When he left it was in excess of £12,000, £8700 coming from his estates in the north parts. For example, he laid down instructions for his officers in the north parts at Michaelmas 1619 and on 4 March 1620 he had set out in some four pages detailed instructions and directions for matters concerning his estates there, to enquire into unpaid rents, wood-sales, waste of wood, out-of-date leases, felons' goods, wardships, wrongs done his tenants and the survey of his lands by Mr. Mason, 'my surveyor'. He was constantly pursuing litigation in the King's Bench,

Court of Common Pleas, Exchequer, Court of Wards, Chancery and Star Chamber. Commonly, his solicitor Thomas Cartwright rented two chambers in London, one for evidence, the other for accounts.⁵

It is not surprising, therefore, that he lived well during his imprisonment, paying £100 a year to the Lieutenant of the Tower for his liberty of diet, keeping households of servants at London, Syon and Petworth, and spending £865 in the last year of his confinement on provisions. He regularly improved his house and gardens at Syon and particularly at Petworth. He kept stables at London, Syon and Petworth. Algernon, Lord Percy (born 1602), was on his Grand Tour in France, costing the Earl £770 in 1620 and £1185 in 1621. Henry Percy (born 1605) the younger son, was at Syon, costing £88 with a further £36 for his schooling and diet. The Countess had died in 1619, but he was paying annuities to his brothers William, Sir Charles, Sir Richard, Sir Josceline and George, who died respectively in 1648, 1628, 1647, 1631 and 1632 (his brothers Thomas and Allan had died in 1587 and 1611) and to his pensioners Thomas Harriot, Walter Warner and Robert Hues. He had debts of £5460 and had purchased land at £4800. He had taken £400 for his private purse (he gambled) and bought plate at £680. Moreover, the diet of the Northumberland household was varied — beef, poultry, fish, oil, olives, capers and anchovies, vinegar, verjuice, salt, oatmeal, oranges, lemons, cherries, strawberries and herbs, claret-white, frontinac, canary, rhenish, muscadel, red and sack wine. His household included Sir Edward Francis, responsible for Petworth, Henry Taylor, his steward at Syon, Mr Edward Dowse, Lord Percy's tutor, and Christopher Ingram, who looked after building at Syon. There were nine resident servants at Petworth and 28 at Syon.⁶

His former servant, Sir Dudley Carleton, congratulated him upon his release assuring him he would never forget how much he owed him; the Earl replied from Petworth a few weeks later (28 August) assuring him he had wiped out the debt by his kindness to Lord Percy on his Grand Tour when he was in Paris a little while before.⁷

Northumberland stayed at Syon for ten days, and then went to Penshurst to see his daughter Lisle. He was ordered to keep away from London and not to travel beyond 30 miles from Petworth but the injunction was removed after a few months

and he was permitted to return from time to time to Syon where he valued his vines. His protégé, Thomas Harriot the polymath, died that summer and he lost no time in having the house re-tiled — the house which he had provided for Harriot to view the heavens with a telescope before Galileo did. He bought two Georges of gold and had the chain and the gilding of his Garter ribbon repaired as well as purchasing a new Garter. He was spending over £200 for his apparel that year including the making of a green suit of Turkish camlet and buying a green cloak, scarf and hat lined with velvet to match as well as a more serviceable black cloth suit. For his further pleasure and that of his household he had 46½ lbs of tobacco, six gross of pipes and wax lights. There were also 17 gallons of aquavita, musk and aubergine to infuse into it to make usquebaugh (whisky). Interestingly, as it was reported that the Earl used eight horses for his coach in response to the six horses provided by James Hay, and his hearing that Buckingham (the king's favourite that he especially disliked) was using six, he bought eight coach-horses for £120 and hired two coaches to take him (and his luggage) to Petworth from London. His prosperity, however, did not mean that he was not in debt. He owed £5460 in 1620 in money borrowed from Sir Edward Francis, Lady Craven, William Tirrey goldsmith, Mr Charles Thynne of the Longleat family and others. He had his 'great pedigree' mended, it being 'very much unglued with lying in the new evidence house at Syon' — presumably the one now at Petworth showing Percy descent from Adam and Eve.

In 1621 he spent over £250 repairing the house at Petworth and even more on the 'new building' at Goodwood. He had four coats of arms painted in the windows of St Thomas's Chapel in Petworth Church. When he paid the subsidy due to James that year he also paid subsidies that ought to have been paid to Elizabeth in 1558 and 1566! He remained alert about his estates, writing, for instance, on 3 February 1622 about one York who had taken a silver bowl off a table in the hall at Petworth and asking Sergeant Carew to deal favourably with him. The same year he subscribed £30 for a free school in Virginia. That year his auditor, William Stockdale, was paid £85 11s. for writing up 348 skins of parchment for the survey book of Northumberland. When Buckingham and his party came to Petworth in August 1622

he had his servant Hugh Potter ask Mr Steward for a buck, Richard Lewknor for venison, and Sir Edward Francis to come down from Wappingham, Northamptonshire; 'there is nobody here can direct.'⁸

At first he had no house in London and wrote to Buckingham in October 1622 explaining that he did not tarry long save to have dinner when he came up on business and asking that the king approved. On 15 November 1623 Chamberlain informed Sir Dudley Carleton that the Earl had hired Sir Richard Harrison's house in the Minories within earshot of the Martin Tower where he had been incarcerated. The rent was £66 13s. 4d. per annum: he spent £65 9s. 4d. on furnishings and repairs there and bought a bed which required 66 yards of *perpetuana* costing £8 5s.⁹

Henry Percy had gone up to Christ Church, Oxford, in 1620 and Northumberland wrote to his tutor, Dr Fell, on 19 August 1622 to tell him that the studies he wished Henry to follow were Latin, Mathematics and 'such other studies as is fittest for a gentleman'. He told Henry 'if you will be as good as your promise you shall find me a father that will be better to you than my promise'. A letter which he had received from Henry was in his writing but not at his indicting and he had not corrected letters he had asked him to amend to make them more legible.¹⁰

By 1622 Northumberland was borrowing as much as £10,901 15s., by 1623 £11,802 7s. 8d. The increase is explained in part by the cost of building at Syon (£495 7s. 4d.), Petworth (£1158 12s. 1d.) and Goodwood (£494 9s.). After his Grand Tour Lord Percy was given an annuity of as much as £1000. The Earl protested at the decline in his revenues from his northern lands. He wrote to John Melton on 25 April 1623 of the poor reckonings he had had from his northern estates, but approved Melton's advice that he should let out at yearly rates for the time being. Thus he wrote to Robert Stapleton on 31 December 1623 that his properties at Nunmunckton, Topcliffe and Leconfield in Yorkshire were all in his hands and where they had brought in £1000 a year had now 'become almost a dead revenue'. He complained in a letter of 15 May 1624 of the slackness of some of his servants and in 1627 he fell out with John Carville, a longstanding servant, but by 1632 he was able to list valuable improvements effected by William Stockdale and his northern rents amounted to £8594 2s.¹¹

Northumberland was not enjoying the best of health in these years. For example, as early as 13

December 1620 he wrote to his servant Whitehead to say 'my eyes grow evil and it is painful to write with spectacles' and he wrote to another servant, John Melton, on 4 October 1623, 'my hand is not so nimble as it was wont and mine eyes require a pair of spectacles'. He was after all nearly 60. At Petworth he complained that what with having to entertain he was not able to bend his thoughts so much to northern business as he could when he was in the Tower. A few months later he welcomed the king's wish that he should have a proxy in Parliament 'for', as he wrote to the Bishop of Lincoln the Lord Keeper, 'I am old and this weather takes hold of me very sensibly' (14 February 1624), but he did protest that he had not believed the king's indignation had been in so high a degree. Or again he told James Hay, Earl of Carlisle, on 7 October 1623 'the sunshine of my day is drawing fast on to his evening and the moonshine of my night does turn his horns westward'. In April 1625 he was confined to bed with the stone. He asked Sir Francis Craven for dispensation from attending St George's day 1627 'in regard of my age and disability'.¹²

He was away from Syon for two years from 1621 to November 1623, paying William Ockwold £12 0s. 9d. board-wages. He settled down at Petworth with a considerable retinue of servants. Henry Taylor was Steward. There were 77 servants including five women who had such descriptions as 'scourer' and were paid less than the men. He had books (he had a collection of 1000 or so) and fruit sent from Syon and he even repaid Sir Paul Bayning £2850 of debt. He spent some £2536 16s. 5d. on new buildings at Petworth in 1625 as well as £361 7s. 3d. on the stables and £146 19s. 4d. on the gardens. He thanked his cousin, Sir Richard Lumley, at Stansted on 28 January 1623 for his 'earnest prosecution of the fellow who stole my trees' and offered to send him as many walnut trees as he wished, but could not furnish chestnut trees.

Northumberland retained an interest in public affairs. He told Buckingham in April 1625 that he was disappointed that King Charles still wanted him not to attend Parliament in person: 'I did well hope that my sorrows for his father's displeasure had taken an end'. On 31 January 1626 he was granted a dispensation to be absent from Parliament allegedly 'in regard of his indisposition of body'. There are at Alnwick extensive collections of Parliamentary papers dating from the period of his retirement, some annotated by him.¹³ Upon

James's death he was reckoned to be a vigorous champion of the privileges of the Commons and an opponent of Buckingham. Indeed, a small group of peers headed by the Earls of Arundel, Bristol and Middlesex looked to him as their leader in opposition. On 1 February 1627 Buckingham was moved to write to him:

'it is common bruit of the Town that your Lordship is resolved to refuse the loan to the King now on foot. I beg your Lordship to think well of it ... To refuse will not advantage your Lordship in the opinion of others and will frustrate my endeavour to settle your Lordship and your children in the King's favour'.

Northumberland refused and only the assassination of Buckingham in August 1628 perhaps saved him and Arundel from the Tower. In 1629, however, Henry Percy was restored to his titles and his seat in Parliament.¹⁴ In 1630 he wrote to the Lord Keeper from Petworth asking for Sir John Leeds to be made Justice of the Peace. 'The place is wild and inhabited with a company of disordered people', Algernon had gone to Syon, Sir Edward Francis and Mr Mills were dead. Meanwhile, Algernon had been summoned to parliament as Baron Percy and made Master of the Horse. After a short while, Algernon resigned and became conspicuous for his opposition to Buckingham, attaching himself to the band of 'Patriots', which then included his college friend Sir Thomas Wentworth, Edward Hyde (later Earl of Clarendon) and Sir Kenelm Digby.¹⁵

It was a matter of extreme distress to the Earl that Algernon married Anne Cecil, the grandchild of Robert Cecil, whom he blamed for his continued incarceration in the Tower, when in 1606 it was widely thought that he would be released early. On 12 January 1628 Reverend Joseph Mead wrote to Sir Martin Stuteville:

'My Lord Percy is bent upon marrying with Lord Salisbury's daughter. £11,000 is her portion but my Lord of Northumberland is averse, because her grandfather was his great enemy'.

Northumberland prophesied to his son: 'the blood of Percy would not mix with that of Cecil if you poured them into a bowl'.¹⁶ The marriage did not, in fact, produce an heir. Algernon and Anne visited the northern Percy estates finding all the ancient castles and manor houses with the single exception of Wressill in a lamentable condition. Bamburgh, Topcliffe, and Leconfield were little more than ruins and Alnwick was falling into decay. The Earl

had appointed Sir William Muschamp constable of Alnwick in October 1629 in preference to Sir John Fenwick because, as he told Fenwick:

‘considering your often want of health and the great trouble this poor employment would be unto you I have thought better to spare than spur a free horse’.

In 1632, Sir John Fenwick brought to Northumberland’s attention that divers lands granted by lease were now nearing expiration and that he was informed the Earl had lost many tenants’ fairs and markets in Northumberland which may now be recovered.¹⁷ There had been no resident Percy in the north since 1585. Soon after the wedding, Algernon went to live at Syon.

The Earl’s life at Petworth, however, did have its compensations. He amused himself with gardening and planting of trees in fine weather; at other times he engaged in chemical researches and read from his well-filled library. He had to employ four readers as his sight almost entirely failed. Among them was Edward Percy, nephew of Thomas Percy, who had robbed him of rents over the Gunpowder Plot and who died at Petworth in 1630. He was still buying books and in 1628 paid John Bill, the London bookseller, £12 16s. for books sent to him in the previous two years. On 29 August 1629 he invited Dudley Carleton, now Viscount Dorchester, to visit him at Petworth or Syon:

‘I hope time will bring it about again that we may communicate some old passages, and laugh at what is past; joy at the present and hope for better to come, which none shall be gladder than your old master’.¹⁸

Henry Percy was still at home. Where Northumberland was content with grey cloth suits, Henry had more striking apparel such as a scarlet cloak with sleeves (costing £10 11s. in 1626).

The Northumberland household continued to be centred on Petworth with a skeleton staff at Syon until Algernon went there. Lord Percy’s annuity was increased to £1250 after his marriage. William Mose, comptroller, and Henry Taylor, steward, were in charge of over 80 servants. Among them were just four women, three ‘laundry women’ and Goodwife Stanbridge. Nathaniel Torporley remained a pensioner at £40 a year as did Walter Warner, who had been looking after the books. Thomas Vertew, on the other hand, porter at Syon, was paid £2 14s. 4d. whereas Christopher

Ingram, who was in charge at Syon, had £25. There were two bakers and a French cook (£10 10s. p.a.) and an *achator* to purchase provisions, Sampson Oast. Other servants were Robert Williams, cook, Mr Parker, gentleman usher, and two gentlemen waiters as well as a Clerk of the Kitchen and a larderman. In April 1629 the Earl took the waters at Bath paying £48 2s. 10d. for lodging and £75 3s. 9d. for the board-wages for servants; the charges of going to Bath were £12 3s. 5d. and coming (to Bath) £12 2s. 9d. with £45 19s. 2d. for William Akes to stay. He remained active in improving the houses and gardens at Petworth and Syon.¹⁹

James Hay and Lucy had no children. However, Northumberland often visited Penshurst as he did in 1632 to see his daughter, Dorothy, and his numerous grandchildren. Perhaps they were in awe of him. Among them, there were Dorothy (15), Philip Lisle (13) and Algernon, his godson born in 1622; he declared them, ‘urchins of great quality and good looks’. Indeed young Dorothy Lisle was to be the *Sacharissa* of lovesick Master Edmund Waller. Robert succeeded as second Earl of Leicester in 1626 and Philip became third Earl, but was better known as Lord Lisle, the Puritan commander in the Civil War. Algernon Lisle was a great Republican and died a martyr to his convictions in 1683 in the Rye House Plot. Northumberland spent much of the summer of 1632 at Penshurst happy in their company, ensconced upon some tanned haycock in the meadows telling them tales, but when in the autumn he returned to Petworth he was suddenly overcome by disease, possibly smallpox, and died on 5 November, a coincidence not unnoticed by contemporaries. He was buried the next day near the altar of the parish church. The funeral charges were £618 13s. 10d.

His epitaph may be of his own composition, his letter to his uncle Lord Knollys during his imprisonment on 14 February 1608 stated:

‘I was never Extortioneer; I never gained by Oppression; I was never Perfidious; I never aught any Man any thing, that he had not Satisfaction for; I never sought any Man’s Blood; I was ever true to my Prince and Country however I might be mistaken; and I have ever held the course of just Proceedings in so high a Veneration, as I never could consent to make a Fault a Virtue in my Friend, and Vice in my Enemy other than a Virtue’.²⁰

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NOTES

- ¹ For the trial and imprisonment of the ninth Earl see G. Brenan, *A History of the House of Percy*, ed. W. A. Lindsay (London: Freemantle, 1902), vol. 2, 116–200 and E. B. De Fonblanque, *Annals of the House of Percy* (London: Richard Clay & Sons, 1887), vol. 2, 258–359. A modern account of the trial may be found in Mark Nicholls, *Investigating the Gunpowder Plot* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 179–81, 185–93. For Chamberlain's letter see E. Thomson (ed.), *The Chamberlain Letters* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 122.
- ² G. R. Batho & S. Clucas, *The Wizard Earl's Advice to his Son* (London: Roxburghe Club, 2002).
- ³ Chamberlain *Letters*, 122, 200, 259.
- ⁴ See G. R. Batho (ed.), *The Household Papers of Henry Percy, ninth Earl of Northumberland* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1962) especially 88–96. The household accounts for the time of his imprisonment are listed on pp. 139–42 and for his retirement on pp. 143–5 and their locations on p. 146. For estate instructions see Alnwick Castle Manuscripts (hereafter ACA) 9A folio 229 and Alnwick Castle Syon House Manuscripts (hereafter ACS), P.1.2 *recto*.
- ⁵ See Brenan, vol. 2, 201–2.
- ⁶ ACS P.I.3n folio 4 *recto*.
- ⁷ ACS P.I.3n folio 7 *recto*.
- ⁸ ACS P.I.3n folio 7 *recto* and ACA 9A folio & 274, 12 folio 112–13.
- ⁹ ACS P.I.3n folio 5 *recto*.
- ¹⁰ ACS P.I.3n folios 12 and 17. P.II.2 x and y.
- ¹¹ ACA 9A folio 266; ACS P.I.3n folio 15 *recto*, folio 22 *verso* and folio 26 *verso*.
- ¹² ACA 12; see for annotations for example folios 130 and 231; also ACA 13.
- ¹³ ACA V.X.5 for letters patent re: Parliament 7 April 1629.
- ¹⁴ See Brenan, vol. 2, 216.
- ¹⁵ Brenan, vol. 2, 370.
- ¹⁶ ACS P.I.3 n folio 32 *recto* and P.II.2 y.
- ¹⁷ ACS P.II.2 y.
- ¹⁸ For the Earl's accounts in his retirement see Batho (1962) as quoted above. See also Brenan, vol., 2, 205–6, on Dorothy Lisle and his grandchildren.
- ¹⁹ Batho (1962).
- ²⁰ De Fonblanque, vol. 2, see Appendix XV for full letter to Lord Knollys. For the Earl's books and manuscripts see G. R. Batho, *The Library of the ninth Earl of Northumberland*, ed. Elisabeth Leedham-Green (Cambridge: Libri Pertinentes, forthcoming).