II.—THE CRASTER FAMILY—THREE GENERATIONS

BY SIR EDMUND CRASTER

In 1682 there set in an agricultural depression that continued for some four years and hit Northumbrian landowners hard. The Crasters, living on their ancestral estate of Craster, were not exempt. There were other reasons too for the financial difficulties that beset them. Edmund Craster, head of the family, had spent money in enlarging the old mansion that had been added to his fourteenth-century border tower. He had indulged in speculation, paying £800 in 1677 to Nicholas Whitehead of Boulmer for the assignment of a lease of Flatworth demesne near North Shields, a lease subject to an annual rent of £200. Judgments obtained against Whitehead and himself in the Court of King's Bench in 1682 had saddled him with a debt of £250 to Mr. Luke Collingwood. He had been obliged to raise £500 from his second cousin, Sir Richard Stote, by mortgaging to him his Craster property and neighbouring lands in Dunstan. And on the top of all this there had come the unfortunate affair of the shrievalty.

Edmund Craster's election, late in 1682, to the combined offices of sheriff of the county and of the country keepership was the source of the trouble. The country keeper was a police officer, charged with protecting the goods and cattle of property owners from the raids of mosstroopers. James Howard of Redesdale had held the keepership for some years past. He disputed Craster's election, and had the support of the Whig county magistrates, his rival being the nominee of the Tory party. Each side took legal opinion.

The issue was referred to Charles II and his Privy Council. The whole county was in an uproar, for both claimants tried to exact the country-keeping rate. The Lord Lieutenant despaired of settling the dispute and sent in his resignation. Edmund Craster ended his year of office with a pile of debts.

He had been reduced to borrowing £300 from that arch moneylender of Tyneside, Dame Dorothy Milbanke, on the security of his lands in Dunstan and Embleton. There was a debt of £300 owing to a London attorney, and a larger one of £400 to Mr. William Bigg of Newcastle. Worst of all, £260 was due to the Exchequer on the sheriff's accounts, and the Lord Treasurer began to press for payment and eventually, in 1685, threatened arrest. Edmund took steps to save the family property from forfeiture by making it over to his eldest son John, a young man who had gone up to Oxford five years earlier to complete his education at Merton College. He himself left home and went to live at Durham. There, under Palatinate jurisdiction, he might consider himself out of easy reach of his creditors.

With a view to raising the £2,100 that were needed to clear the Craster estates from all encumbrances, negotiations were started with Mr. Alexander Browne of Twisel. An agreement was entered into with that gentleman in 1688 under which he should have Craster, apparently rent-free, for twenty-one years, conditionally upon his advancing the money that was needed to settle the sheriff's account, meeting all other debts and paying off the mortgages. Matters in the end took another turn, though not in the lifetime of Edmund Craster, who died at Durham in March 1690, and was buried there in the Church of St. Mary le Bow in the Bailey.

Four months earlier his son John had been married, by a non-conformist minister, to a young lady whose father, John Ayton, had a property at Fawside, four miles west of Chester-le-Street. Mary Ayton regretted that she had not had a Church of England service, and eventually, after four years of married life, persuaded her husband to repeat the

ceremony in St. Nicholas, Newcastle. John's younger brother, Edmund, who lived on at Craster and saw to the winding up of his father's personal affairs, also married. His wife, Margaret Steward, came from Stamford near Embleton. His sister Ann was already the wife of a Stamford gentleman-farmer named William Grey. Other sisters also found husbands—Barbara in Nicholas Whitehead of Lesbury Field House, son to her father's business partner, and Mary in John Atkinson of Gateshead,[1] whose family again became united with the Crasters a hundred years later.

In 1692, his father being dead, John Craster set to work in earnest to redeem the family property. After increasing the Stote mortgage from £500 to £800, presumably to allow the clearance of smaller debts, he released—probably for a sum of money down—all claim to Craster South Side, now called Craster South Farm. This had been sold by his great-grandfather, an earlier John Craster, in 1638, to a kinsman, Thomas Forster of Adderstone, and since then, after being owned for a time by our John's uncle, Martin Fenwick of Kenton, had passed to one George Burrell, to whom John now gave release. Then, final stage in these transactions, Alexander Browne once more appeared upon the scene, and bought, for the sum of £1,500, the farm lands that the Crasters had owned for some centuries past in Dunstan and Embleton. Most of the purchase-money went to paying off the Stote and Milbanke mortgages; but, out of the balance and £200 advanced to him by the accommodating Mr. Browne, John Craster was able at long last to meet his father's obligations as sheriff.

Alexander Browne did not retain his purchase for long. Perhaps he had never intended to do so. The Embleton holding was tenanted by a Quaker family named Christon, who eventually bought their farm lands, and these, when finally enclosed, went to make up the property since known as Christon Bank. Mr. Browne added to his Dunstan purchase by buying up for £1,800 the estate of the ancient but

[1] Bonds of marriage, 21 May, 1689, and 13 Sept. 1701.

impoverished Wetwang family, and subsequently, in 1705, exchanged Dunstan and other lands with Mr. John Proctor for the properties of Shawdon and Crawley. So it came about that the old tower-house of Dunstan, which had formed the ancestral home of the Wetwangs, and before them of the Wendouts, acquired the name of Proctor Steads. We shall see presently how the Dunstan lands came to be bought back for Craster in the next generation.

For the time being the family property was reduced to 425 acres, known as Craster North Side. Near its southern border stood the square four-storey tower which an earlier Edmund Craster had built in the fourteenth century, enlarged by the addition, on its eastern side, of a seventeenth-century manor-house. A walled forecourt fronted the house on the south, separating it from a formal garden in one corner of which stood a pavilion or summer-house. An east-and-west road ran at the back of the Tower and continued seaward between the cottages of a little village whose inhabitants, chiefly fisher-folk, had not as yet been moved down to the haven. The foundations of its few houses are still traceable in the grass field south of Fishers' Hill. Across the road from the Tower were the buildings of the home farm.

A plan of the property made early in the eighteenth century records the names of its fields. There were several arable closes known respectively as the Joncasters, the Forebank, the Mill piece, the close adjoining Dunstan ground, the Dovecote close and the Kiln close. Mill, dovecote and kiln have long since vanished. Most of what is now Craster West Farm was then pasture ground, namely the North Moor, the two Windysides, a field called the Cawes, and a close adjoining the wet land that is now called Stamford Bog but was then known as Stamford Lough.

John Craster never himself resided in the family home, but spent the earlier years of his married life in his father-in-law's house at Fawside; and, when John Ayton died in 1702, leaving his daughter, Mary Craster, a marriage portion of £800, the young couple with their little children moved to

Chester-le-Street. Craster may have been occupied at the time by a cousin, William Craster, who voted at the Northumberland parliamentary elections of 1710 and 1715 in virtue of property at Craster. William's father, Daniel, younger brother to old Edmund Craster, had been a Jacobite, and had held a commission in a regiment which the Duke of Newcastle raised to support James II on his tottering throne; and William was of the same party. When Thomas Forster of Bamburgh, M.P. for the county, declared for the Old Pretender in 1715, he only succeeded in enlisting three Northumbrian gentry for the Stuart cause, but William was one of them.[2] He is said to have been taken prisoner and ordered to be executed. However, with the failure of the rising and the execution of its more prominent supporters, the Government and local magistracy did not greatly concern themselves with minor adherents. Though orders were made in Quarter Sessions for the arrest of disaffected persons, a return made three years later reported that William Craster, though suspected to be concerned in the late rebellion and known to reside at Rock, could not be found upon search made for him. There the matter was allowed to rest, and William died in peace in 1725 at Rock Moor House, the farm that Thomas Proctor of Rock had leased to him.

Meanwhile John Craster was bringing up his young family at Chester-le-Street. He had paid off his father's debts and was evidently prospering, for he was able, in 1710, to purchase from Lady Crewe and her Jacobite nephew, Thomas Forster, the lease of Shoreswood, a property of about 1,200 acres some three miles east of Norham. Shoreswood was held of the Dean and Chapter of Durham at a low rental but subject to the payment of a heavy fine upon every renewal of the lease. The purchase price was £1,250, of which John was in a position to pay down £700, the vendors taking a mortgage for the residue.

His three sons were clever boys. John, the eldest, was sent up in 1712 to his father's college of Merton, from which

[2] Robert Patten, *History of the Rebellion*, 4th ed., 1745, p. 118.

he migrated two years later to Corpus, and, having taken his degree and being intended for the legal profession, went on to London in 1716 to study law at Gray's Inn. There were five girls, but one had died in infancy, and Barbara, the eldest of the family, died in 1715 when she was twenty-four. Their maiden aunt, Sarah Ayton, to whom her father had devised Fawside and various small holdings in the county of Durham, was evidently attached to John Craster and his family. Dying in 1719, she left him all her properties, and he returned to live at Fawside.

Next year the two younger boys left their school at Sedbergh[2a] for Oxford. William went to Oriel; Bertram or Bartie (he had been christened Bartholomew at his mother's request, having been born on St. Bartholomew's Day) matriculated at Brasenose, but subsequently left it for Lincoln College. In the autumn of 1720 their sister Isabel found a husband in a neighbouring squire, John Myllot of Whitehill near Chester-le-Street. Family tradition says that theirs was a Gretna Green wedding. However that may have been, the ceremony was duly performed at Ebchester.

So John Craster was left at home with his wife and his two youngest daughters. He was failing in health, and wrote to his son John outlining his wishes for the disposal of his property. "The time of dissolution," he wrote, "seems to approach. I am so ill that I have not strength nor time to order my affairs as I would." Nevertheless, he lingered on until July 1722. On his death his body was taken home to Northumberland, for burial in Embleton church, in "Craster's porch", where the family pew still is. By his will he left Craster and Shoreswood, with the bulk of the Durham properties, to his son John, and to each of his two younger sons an annuity of £80 out of Shoreswood, whither his widow retired with their two unmarried daughters.

Her two younger sons both took their degrees in the following year. William succeeded in obtaining a fellowship at his College and prepared to settle down to the life

[2a] E. Hughes, *North Country Life in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 357.

of an Oxford don. Oriel was an inharmonious society at this time, for Provost Carter claimed the right of withholding consent from any fellowship election and was at loggerheads with the Senior Common Room. So when, on the morning after his election, William Craster went with other newly elected Fellows to ask the Provost to summon a meeting for their admission, the Provost refused point-blank and was not brought to reason until the College had brought a successful action against him in the Court of Common Pleas. Provost Carter did not long survive his defeat, dying in 1727 when William voted for the successful candidate for the vacant Provostship. This is his last recorded act. He died in October 1729 at the early age of twenty-eight, and was buried in the University church of St. Mary's.[3]

Less is known of the young Bartie. After taking his degree, he secured readmission to his old college of Brasenose. He had already followed his elder brother John to Gray's Inn, and was called to the Bar in February 1728/9. He was still living and drawing his annuity in 1740. That is the last that is heard of him. He never married. Some of his books, including a *Paradise Lost* and an Anacreon, are in the library at Craster Tower.

John Craster, the eldest son, was away in London, devoting himself to the Bar, to which he had been called six months before his father died. The family mansion at Craster and its home farm were probably let to a kinsman, Daniel Craster, second of that name and elder brother of that William whom we saw going out with Tom Forster in "the Fifteen". Daniel is recorded in 1737 as paying £200 yearly rent for Craster mansion-house and demesne. This he farmed in conjunction with Dunstan Hill Farm, which he had on lease from his brother-in-law, John Proctor.

The offices of the home farm were now rebuilt. They form a picturesque group of brick farm buildings, with red pantile roofs, now partly derelict. The sum of £230 which

[3] Richards and Shadwell, *Provosts and Fellows of Oriel College*, 1922, p. 134.

John Craster noted that he had spent upon them probably included the £125 spent in 1724 on a stable for ten horses which formed their southern range. Shoreswood, where his mother and sisters were residing, also received his attention. To meet the expenses of development and to allow the payment of a fine to the Dean and Chapter for the renewal of the lease, he raised £2,000 by a mortgage on the property in 1728.

In that year old Mrs. Craster died and was buried at Norham. The elder unmarried daughter, Elizabeth, became the wife, in the following summer, of Christopher Blackett of Haughton, a kinsman of her brother-in-law Myllot, and settled at Newham. Her younger sister Ann remained to be provided for, but the Myllots found a husband for her also. John Myllot's stepmother had re-married Mr. John Wood of Beadnell. A marriage was eventually arranged between her other stepson, Thomas Wood, and Ann Craster, and took place in December 1737. In this way the families of Craster and of Wood of Beadnell became for the first time united.

So long as he was a bachelor, John Craster kept his rooms in Gray's Inn, but early in 1727 he too married. His bride, Catherine Villiers, had been living with her brother Henry in the parish of Christ Church, Newgate. Her father, Henry Villiers, who had died twenty years previously, was a former governor of Tynemouth Castle; and the governor's house, which her grandfather, Sir Edward Villiers, built on the castle promontory on the north side of the ruined priory church, had been the Villiers' home during the latter part of the previous century. As nephew to the great Duke of Buckingham and uncle to the notorious Duchess of Cleveland, Sir Edward had been closely connected with the Stuart court in which he held the post of Knight Marshal. Nor had the Revolution of 1688 reduced the Villiers' fortunes, for two of Sir Edward's daughters, Elizabeth and Ann, had been maids of honour to the Princess Mary in Holland. There William of Orange had fallen in love with Elizabeth

and taken her to be his mistress, and had married Ann to his closest friend, William Bentinck, afterwards Earl of Portland. So when the Prince of Orange succeeded to the English Crown as William III, Elizabeth Villiers rose to power with her royal lover. It was perhaps as the result of her influence that her elder brother Edward was created Earl of Jersey. Although, yielding to Queen Mary's dying request, the King eventually sent Elizabeth away from his Court, he found for her at the same time a husband in Lord George Hamilton, one of Marlborough's most distinguished generals; created him Earl of Orkney, and bestowed upon them vast estates, including all King James's lands in Ireland. Out of their riches the Orkneys built themselves a noble residence at Cliveden on the Thames.

Catherine Villiers must have found her aunt Elizabeth a remarkable personage, for, though she is said to have "squinted like a dragon", the great Dean Swift, no mean judge of intelligence, described her as the wisest woman he ever knew. Aunt Mary was also still living and was Dowager Lady Inchiquin. Aunt Barbara, who was Lady Fitzharding, and Aunt Henrietta, Countess of Breadalbane, had both died some years before Catherine married, but their children, her cousins, were her friends. Evidently she had the entry into good society. Yet she was not possessed of any fortune, her resources being apparently limited to a life annuity of £40 out of Tynemouth lighthouse dues and to a pension of £200 from Queen Anne which she shared with her sisters Barbara and Frances, and which had been vested in their aunt Orkney for their joint use.[4]

The John Crasters set up house in Tooke's Court, opening out of Furnival Street off Holborn, and Lord Orkney provided them with a country home, then named Park Gate House but now Taplow Lodge, on Taplow Common, opposite the gates of Cliveden. The house still stands, though it has been much enlarged and now forms the central block of a home for nurses of the Canadian War Memorial Hos-

[4] *Ach. Ael.*, 2nd ser., vol. xx, p. 22.

pital. One of its original rooms—that on the left of the entrance—retains a charming carved-wood fireplace, with overmantel and wall panelling.

It was in Tooke's Court that John and Catherine had their first child born to them; a little girl named Mary after her Craster grandmother, who stood godmother to her and subsequently left her a legacy of £50. Two boys followed—John and then Edmund; but little Edmund was a sickly child and died when he was ten months old. Then came George, born in December 1734, and named after his two godfathers, Lord Orkney and George Granville, Lord Lansdowne, who had both married into the Villiers family. Nine months before George was born, his sister Mary had died at Taplow at the age of seven. His elder brother John died when he too was seven years old, and was buried at Taplow alongside his sister. Another little girl had been born a month earlier and named Frances after her godmother, Lord Orkney's younger daughter, Lady Frances Saunderson, who subsequently became Lady Scarbrough. Of the five children, George and Frances alone were left.

After his mother's death in 1728, John Craster improved the family residence at Shoreswood, then called Moor Hall but now known as Shoreswood Hall, keeping it and some 300 acres in hand as a demesne farm and staying here on his visits to the North. A small colliery near to it was working at least as early as 1736. The remainder of the Shoreswood estate was let as a farm of a thousand acres. John Craster records the building of its farmhouse and offices at the cost of over £300. Other farmhouses built by him at this period were those of Craster West Farm or, as it was at first called, Windyside Farm or Craster Lough House, built in 1744 for £133, and Dunstan Hill Farm, with its barns, stables and byres, built in 1741-4 at the cost of £266. This last served a farmhold which he had succeeded in buying back from the Proctors in 1736 for £2,450. Its 305 acres represent the lands in Dunstan that his father had sold to Alexander Browne. The Craster estates in Northumberland and

Durham were now in 1737 reckoned by their owner as totalling 2,090 acres and as yielding a net rent of £680 13s. 9d.

By this time John Craster had moved out of Tooke's Court into better quarters in Carey Street at the back of the present Law Courts. In 1742 he was made a Bencher of his Inn, and he continued to practise at the Bar at least up to 1747. But he spent much time at Taplow, where he had his brother-in-law, Henry Villiers, as a neighbour. As Lord Orkney's executor he had access to the old general's papers at Cliveden, and there still remain at Craster copies which he made of a letter written to Orkney by Alexander Pope, and of Orkney's own letters describing the principal engagements in Marlborough's wars—Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde and Malplaquet.[5] Here at Taplow his ten-year-old girl, Frances, died in 1748. His one remaining child, George, was by now an oppidan at Eton.[6]

A little later he left Carey Street for number 40 Lincoln's Inn Fields. The house no longer exists, for it was pulled down in 1834 to make way for an extension to the Royal College of Surgeons.[7] It would be interesting to know more of the acquaintance—though it may have been only slight—which John Craster struck up at this time with Samuel Johnson, then still working away on his Dictionary,[8] or of the reasons that led Johnson's friend, the novelist Samuel Richardson, to send to Craster a presentation copy of *Sir Charles Grandison.* John Craster certainly had literary tastes and these are evinced by the books which he began collecting when still an undergraduate. After he married, he started to buy all the current literature which he wished to read, and so he amassed a respectable gentleman's library which remains, reasonably intact, at Craster. His taste was sound and representative of his time and class. For Pope

[5] Printed, from the Craster copies, in *English Historical Review*, vol. xix (1904), pp. 307-21.

[6] Austen Leigh, *Eton College Register*, 1698-1752, p. 89; *Eton College Lists*, 1678-1790, p. 44. George's Eton school books are still in the library at Craster.

[7] *L.C.C. Survey of London*, vol. iii, pt. 1, p. 52.

[8] *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. Croker, 1831, vol. I, p. 227 note.

he had a particular enthusiasm. Already in his Oxford days he had acquired a taste of genealogy, and this led him to pursue researches, from the time he entered into his property, into the history of his own family. So he left behind him a useful and fairly accurate account of his descent, based on public records, wills in the Durham probate registry, and deeds in his possession.

That he was a successful lawyer, with good capacity for business, is plain from his career. A small miniature at Craster, supposed to be of him, shows little more than a clean-shaven face, closely cropped iron-grey hair, a well-formed nose, a somewhat retreating chin, and bright grey eyes that impart a certain birdlike alertness to his expression. John Craster reveals himself better, in an account which he has left of a three-day ride through Lincolnshire to Scarborough, as a man of wit and cultivation, with tags of Horace at his command, and as of an enquiring disposition with a special interest in heraldry and architecture.

At Sleaford he "met my Lord C—— and his chaplain, after one of his peregrinations; trying, I suppose, if possible to travel from himself. We renewed old acquaintance. His Lordship entertained us with very good wine. But I had a bad supper, dull conversation and long prayers. *Dii meliora piis.*" Of Lincoln, which he passed through on the second day, he writes ecstatically, "This is a place a man of fortune and leisure would wish to live in, and a man of business to retire to.

> *O rus! Quando ego te aspiciam, quandoque licebit*
> *Nunc veterum libris, nunc somno et inertibus horis*
> *Ducere solicitae jucunda oblivia vitae?*

The roads for ten miles round are the best in the world, the country high, open, pleasant and plentiful; the climate mild; the air rather sharp than soft, but serene and clear; the whole circuit fit for airing, riding or sporting." A ride over the Wolds from Beverley brought him on the third day to Scar-

borough. "(*Brundusium longae finis chartaeque viaeque*), with a great deal of uneasiness, being severely galled"; and he adds:

"How happy is the tough skin which wears like a buff skin
Without crack or flaw;
For there's no abiding the torment of riding
When buttocks are raw."

Through the help of his wife's kinsman, Thomas Villiers, afterwards Earl of Clarendon, and with the approval of Carteret, Earl Granville, John Craster was elected member, in 1754, for Lord Weymouth's pocket-borough of Weobley in Herefordshire, and so obtained a seat in Parliament. He had stipulated that his election expenses should not exceed £800. He sat in the House of Commons through the remainder of Newcastle's sole ministry and throughout the coalition ministry of Newcastle and Pitt.

Son George was now a young man of twenty and, his Eton days being over, was entered in this same year at Gray's Inn, where his father was a Bencher; not with any intention, it may be presumed, of practising at the Bar, but in order to acquire such knowledge of the law as befitted a future landowner. By way of further completing his education, John Craster gave him £100 to go to France. Two years later the indulgent father bought his son a commission in the Royal Troop of Horse Guards. It cost him £2,000 which was in part met by increasing the mortgage on Shoreswood from £2,000 to £3,200.

Near the south-west corner of Lincoln's Inn Fields, a few doors away from John Craster's town house, there stood and still stands, although now converted into solicitors' offices, a house numbered 46. It was occupied by a widowed lady, Mrs. Sharpe, a Cartwright by birth (though not of the Aynho line), and relict of Mr. John Sharpe, Solicitor of the Treasury and M.P. for the notorious rotten borough of

Callington. She had a daughter named Olive. The young people at numbers 40 and 46 became acquainted. Both were good-looking, though of sallow complexion and indifferent constitution. He had his Guards' uniform and she was said to have a fortune of £30,000. On February 3rd, 1757, George and Olive were married in the neighbouring church of St. Clement Dane's.

It was no runaway match. John Craster, as has been observed, was a lawyer, and the ample marriage settlement concluded on the day before the wedding had for its trustees Lord Jersey and no less a person than the Lord Chancellor, the eminent Lord Macclesfield. The bride appears to have received a jointure of £10,000, with a further £10,000 upon her mother's death. She also brought into settlement £8,000, a sum lent out on mortgage, and which it was intended should be invested in the purchase of lands as near as convenient to the manor of Craster. John Craster cherished, it seems, the idea of rounding off the family estate by buying back Craster South Farm. On his part he gave his son an annuity of £400 during his own lifetime, and the reversion, on his death, of his estates in Northumberland and Durham.

A memorandum which he drew up preparatory to the settlement gives particulars as to the state of his properties. The family house at Craster is there stated to be ruinous and sadly in need of repair. Old Daniel Craster had given up his lease, and the house was now let, with the demesne farm and Craster West Farm, for £250 to Mr. Marmaduke Grey, ancestor of the Bacon Greys of Styford. Dunstan Hill Farm was let for £120. The main part of the Shoreswood estate was let at £260; the colliery there was stated to bring in on the average £250 a year; and Shoreswood Hall, where John Craster resided when in the north, was estimated as having a yearly value of £100. Three Durham copyhold farms with a colliery wayleave brought in £232. Rents in all totalled £1,324 16s. They had nearly doubled in the space of twenty years; such was the effect of agricultural improvements.

Mrs. Sharpe had the young couple to live with her until

she died in 1760. Olive and her brother then divided the Sharpe family silver between them. She and George bought themselves a glass coach for £140, which John Craster promised to pay for but did not. George's mother ordered £390 worth of jewellery for her daughter-in-law, for which John Craster also undertook to pay; but the jeweller, for all his insistent demands, never received payment until George produced the money himself. There seems to have been some bickering between father and son.

The fact is that other matters were beginning to engage the old lawyer's attention. Some six weeks before his son married, an aged widow died in Upper Brook Street, childless and intestate. Her name was Dame Dorothy Windsor. She was the last surviving child of that Sir Richard Stote who had helped to make John Craster's grandfather sheriff of Northumberland in Charles II's reign, and whose mother, Jane Bewick, had for her grandfather an Edmund Craster who had owned Craster in the days of Elizabeth. So she was third cousin once removed to John. What was also much to the point, she owned large and profitable estates in the south of Northumberland. These comprised 1,759 acres in Kirkheaton (including Kirkheaton Hall and a landsale colliery), 1,056 in Long Benton, 296 in Willington, and 89 acres in Jesmond. John's genealogical researches gave prospect of yielding a substantial dividend. He asserted his claim to be Dame Dorothy's next-of-kin and heir.

As was to be expected, there were rival claimants. Sir Robert Bewicke of Close House also set up to be next-of-kin and heir at law; while the Earl of Northumberland, the Earl of Carlisle and Sir William Blackett all asserted that there were no heirs at all and claimed various portions of the estates as escheats. More than one suit was started in the Court of Exchequer, and legal proceedings dragged on for three years, threatening to involve the litigants in considerable expense. John Craster thought it wise to come to terms with Sir Robert Bewicke and make common cause with him against the other parties. They agreed to act in

concert and to share expenses and benefits. Events justified the Craster-Bewicke partnership. Judgment was given in their favour, and they entered into possession of the coveted estates as tenants in common.

George and Olive were otherwise, and perhaps more pleasantly, employed. The Seven Years War had prevented them from taking a honeymoon on the Continent at the time of their marriage, but after Mrs. Sharpe's death, although the war was still on, they set out in the autumn of 1760 upon their grand tour. George had been in France before he married, and now they visited Paris together, setting out from it, presumably in their coach, in November for Montpellier. They drove through the forest of Fontainebleau,

> "the finest and most romantic scene" [Olive wrote] "I ever saw of a thick wood growing out of the most amazing rocks of a grey mottled stone, and craggy cliffs a vast height and considerable length".

Of Montpellier, where they stayed till the end of January, she wrote without enthusiasm but with some descriptive power:

> "Montpellier in situation is beyond description beautiful, and at this time, December, the sun is too hot and the air pretty mild; but the evenings, after the sun is set, are extremely cold and piercing. The town is not agreeable; the streets very narrow. The houses are mostly surrounded with high walls on purpose to keep off the sun, which is insupportably hot in summer but which makes the house very dark and dull. The streets are also ill paved for walking. . . . A very poor society; the people proud and envious; the gentlemen all intrigue with the grisettes, who are pretty and lively, neat legs and walk well. The ladies are mostly ugly and formal, and have none of the gaiety and life usually given by travellers to the Lanquedocierie."

The greater part of 1761 was spent by the travellers in the south of France. Bordeaux, Marseilles and Aix were visited in turn. They reached Genoa in November, and by January 1762 were in Naples in apartments facing the sea. Here they went to the opera; and Olive took Italian lessons,

spent £31 on a blue and silver *négligé*, and bought tortoise-shell boxes and bric-à-brac in the Neapolitan shops. Early in June they were at the Ville de Londres in Rome, where they were helped in their stay by a fellow countryman, the abbé Grant; "a very friendly good sort of man and very useful to strangers". "All antiques," Olive wrote, "are to be met with here, though at present very difficult; anything rare that is to be found being bought in immediately and at high prices. What is good and really valuable cannot be bought so cheap as strangers imagine; the Romans well know their value; I mean pictures, statues, cameos, intaglios, etc., that are antique." While at Rome, she and her husband sat for their portraits—George in his uniform to Battoni; Olive in her blue and silver, with her tame squirrel on her wrist, to Nathaniel Dance. The artists' combined fees amounted to the modest sum of 61½ scudi, or £15 7s. 6d. in English money. A certain signora Tibaldi was employed to reproduce the portraits in miniature.

Autumn came, and on August 19th they reached Florence, where Sir Horace Mann, the British minister and correspondent of Horace Walpole, proved himself "a most polite, obliging and very friendly man". Ten days at the end of September were sufficient for the sights of Venice; and so they travelled, by way of Milan and Turin, back over the Mont Cenis into France, arriving at Lyons on the first of November. Here riding, dancing lessons, guitar lessons, the buying and making of new dresses, balls and evenings at the comedy, whiled away a pleasant winter. George's pocket-book still holds a playful letter written to his wife by a French nobleman at Lyons, begging her to attend his fête in her English *coiffeur*, "*qui fait infiniment mieux ressortir toutes les graces du visage*". From Lyons they came back to Paris. Some portions of a Sèvres tea-set which they bought there are still at Craster, its pieces decorated with the partridges and kingfishers beloved by the painter Alonde.

So at length the grand tour was over, and in the summer of 1763 George and Olive were back in England. Old John

Craster was failing in health. Two years earlier he had written to inform Lord Weymouth of his intention to give up his seat in Parliament at the forthcoming election. "The bustle of life," he wrote, "is over with me, for daily admonitions tell me 'tis time to retire." In June 1763 he drafted his will. A month later he was writing from Shoreswood to his sister, Isabel Mylott, "My daughter wrote to my wife a week ago that she and my son were coming down; but, whether they come or not, God knows, for we are left entirely in the dark." In December he was lying ill at Taplow. His will was at last engrossed and signed on Christmas Eve, and on the last night of the old year he died. The bustle of life was indeed over with him. He was buried a week later in Taplow old church. It has been pulled down since then, and a grass lawn in front of the windows at Taplow Court now covers his grave. For a time his hatchment hung in the old church;[9] he had always loved heraldry. It too has gone.

Under the settlement made upon George and Olive's marriage, Craster and Dunstan Hill, Shoreswood and the principal Durham farms had been settled, along with Olive's £8,000, upon George and his male issue, subject to John's life interest. But John had reserved to himself the reversion, that is the right to dispose of these properties in the event of his son having no such issue; and as yet there were no children. He had also acquired, since the settlement was made, an undivided moiety of Dame Dorothy Windsor's estates, and of this he had free disposal. By his will he settled the Windsor estates upon his son in tailmale, and created an entail under which all the settled properties should pass, in the event of his son leaving no male issue, to the testator's second cousin, Daniel Craster of Preston, only son of that other Daniel, who had tenanted Craster twenty-five years before. He made his wife sole executor and left her an annuity of £100, together with his plate and pictures, the furniture of his house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, the chariot

[9] Lipscomb, *History of Buckinghamshire*, 1847, vol. iii, p. 302.

and horses in his London stables, and all his other personal effects. There were also annuities of £50 each to his two sisters, Isabell Mylott and Ann Wood; and he empowered his son to raise £1,000 for distribution among his nephews and nieces. A life interest in two small Durham farms was given to George Empson, an illegitimate son of the testator's father.

George Craster had no wish to live on at Taplow, and his wife succeeded in letting Park Gate House to Stephen Fox, Lord Holland's son and elder brother to Charles James Fox. A letter written by Olive to her husband in June 1764 tells him of her successful let, and, incidentally, provides a good self-portrait of the lively lady.

"I received your kind letter of the 14th, from Chester [le Street], and am extremely happy to find you continue so well. I pray God you may go on and prosper. I wish you may prevail upon Aunt Mylott to accompany you to Shoreswood, as it is most likely the change of air and exercise will do her good, and she will be a little company for you in the evenings, for she is very cheerful, and by your description of [*blank*] you must be rather dull.

"The days I am in Town, our friends are so obliging to find me out, and I have visits from the moment I arrive till I set out again. I came to Town last Saturday, and went Sunday morning to the Lodge, having been prevented going before. They are all well and desired their loves to you. I returned here on Tuesday, and yesterday had to breakfast with me Mr. Fox, Macartney[10] and Tighe, and have let Taplow to Fox and Tighe for two years at fifty pound a year.

"Crew[11] carried me down to Richmond last week in his curricle which he drove very well, but I was so fatigued with dancing the night before at Lady Holland's that I could not enjoy the pleasure of going in that pretty carriage. I danced till three in the morning country dances, when I was requested to dance a minuet, which I did with Macartney and another with Fox. I received many compliments, but was vexed to see no lady would

[10] George Macartney was at this time Stephen Fox's bear-leader and one of the most popular young men in Town. He afterwards rose to eminence as ambassador in China and became Lord Macartney.

[11] John Crewe, then a young man of twenty-two, a member of the Holland House circle, and created, in 1806, Baron Crewe of Crewe.

dance afterwards. The gentlemen endeavoured to comfort me with the assurance that I danced so good a minuet, the ladies would not venture after me. This I took in flattery; but Lady Holland, at whose request I danced, expressed much pleasure. We had an elegant supper, and the whole was very agreeable. There was the Duchess of Grafton, Lady Northumberland, Lady Bute and her two daughters, Lady Pembroke, Lady Waldegrave, Lady Sophia Cartwright, etc.; the Duke of Gordon and Lord William, Lord Villiers, etc. We were about twelve and fifteen couple.

"I go tomorrow to Richmond, and we all set out for Stowe on Monday next, and shall be at Hagley, as I wrote in my last, about the 1st, or 2nd, of July, where, if you can meet us, well; if not, I shall leave that place for Town, the 5th, or 6th. So we may meet in Pall Mall if it should not suit you to be at Hagley before that time; for 'tis now my time for Tonbridge."

George and Olive had the entry to the great houses of Stowe and Hagley through their friendship with the Lyttletons, more especially with Lord Cobham's brother, handsome Sir Richard Lyttelton, and with his plain rich elderly wife, the Dowager Duchess of Bridgewater, of whom the poet Shenstone wrote that she was "the most unceremonious even-tempered woman that lives". In Town, Lincoln's Inn Fields was ceasing to be fashionable. Old Mrs. Craster had given up her house there and gone to live for a time at Tonbridge.[12] The house in Pall Mall in which Olive awaited her husband's return had been taken by them when they came back from the Continent, and was to remain their London home for the rest of their married lives.

The family mansion at Craster had fallen vacant, for Marmaduke Grey had died there in October 1764, and his widow had given up house and farm. In the following September George's cousin, lame, skittish Betty Wood, wrote to her brother from her aunt Mylott's at Chester-le-Street: "We have had Mr. and Mrs. Craster here twice. They have left Shoreswood entirely and gone to live at Craster; but he talks of building a house at Fawside which is in this neighbourhood, for, upon consulting lawyers, he finds he

[12] *Horace Walpole's Letters*, ed. Toynbee, vol. vi., p. 101.

has a right to dispose of all the estates in this county, owing to his father neglecting to take surrenders out of the court at Durham to his will, which makes it of no effect as to these estates." Nevertheless, second thoughts prevailed. In February 1767 Betty Wood reported that George and Olive had made a very long stay at Craster that summer and had only just set off for London. They had decided by this time to rebuild, or rather to add on a square Georgian block of rooms to the south side of the tower, converting the earlier house to use as offices and servants' quarters. From George's note, made in April 1770, of "things to order for the finishing of Craster", it appears that the new work was by that time practically complete.

George did little to increase his father's library, though he appreciated it sufficiently to leave it by will as an heirloom to accompany the Craster estate. Apart from French and Italian guide-books, the few books that he bought were chiefly dictionaries and other works on gardening. He had a decided interest in horticulture. His improvements at Craster included the construction of a conservatory near the house and the making of the present brick-walled garden at some little distance from it. His pocket-ledger for 1769 records a payment of three guineas to Mr. Hastings "for a plan of my garden".

Sailing furnished him with another pastime, and in 1766 he bought for £27 15s. a Thames-built sloop named the *Friend's Goodwill*. He shot and he fished; yet, despite of this, George, with all his waistcoats, his town-bred manners, and that air of arrogant superiority that lives on in Battoni's portrait, was not wholly popular with his county neighbours. Betty Wood writes of how Mr. Bacon of Adderstone "fell upon my cousin C. and took him to pieces very genteely. Dixon seemed very uneasy for fear he should go too great lengths, as I was present, and gave him the broadest hints that I was a relation; but the other would not hold his tongue."

We are not told what the neighbours thought of Olive.

For all her vivacity, her health was causing alarm. In March 1769 Sir John Pringle, a leading London doctor, was called in, and, after his visit, she and her husband went down to Bristol, presumably to take a cure at the hot wells. After spending, as was their wont, the later summer months at Craster, they decided to winter abroad and went in October to Paris. They had been there for little more than six weeks when Olive died.

George determined that his wife should be buried, with due pomp, in the new family vault which he had made in Embleton church. So her body was brought to England and taken north from London in a coach drawn by six horses. A black velvet pall covered the coffin. Decked with black ostrich feathers and accompanied by horsemen and postillions in funeral cloaks and wearing crêpe hatbands, the hearse was driven at walking pace along the Great North Road and arrived, after twenty-four days, at Craster, whence the coffin was taken to Embleton for interment. The total expenses of the journey came to £288 18s. Nor was this the whole outlay of the funeral. There were mourning rings, twenty-two in number and costing a guinea each, to be distributed among friends and relations. Superior tokens were reserved for Sir Richard Lyttelton and his wife the Duchess. Their rings, costing eleven guineas each, were set with brilliants.

There had been no children by the marriage. Still George was only thirty-five when his wife died, and there was time for him to marry again. He had certainly wanted to found a family, and had drafted a petition to His Majesty asking for the conferment of a title. But for the moment his thoughts turned again to Paris. It was going to be gay there in the following summer, for the marriage of the young Dauphin, afterwards Louis XVI, to Marie Antoinette had been fixed for May 17th, 1770. George resolved to see what he could; and so to Paris he went, accompanied by his friend, Mr. Aynsley; and, after the festivities at Versailles were over, sat down to send a rather dull account of them home. During

the days that followed, he found himself caught up in "a round of balls, masquerades, plays, etc.". One of these masquerades was the occasion of a mishap. The Duchess of Northumberland persuaded him to lend her his *vis à vis*, her own coach being under repair. She picked up Lady Berkeley, and, as she notes in her diary,[13] "we were not got twenty yards before it turned over with us. But, though all glass, providentially we were not cut nor the glasses broke." It cost George 600 livres to repair.

After the usual autumn visit to Craster, he was back again in Paris in October. He may even have thought of settling there, for in the following January (1771) he took himself a house on the Boulevards. But his health, never good, was beginning to fail. In May he fell ill, and, when he passed through London in July on his way to Craster, he made his will. Though able to attend Kelso races in September, he was a sick man, never to leave his north-country home again.

He had no particular affection for the Daniel Crasters On the other hand he liked his Wood cousins at Beadnell. His aunt's two sons were both in the Army. John Wood was an officer in George's old regiment, and one of George's last acts was to buy the younger brother, Thomas, a commission as lieutenant in the 20th Foot. There was a bedroom reserved at Craster Tower for one or other of them. George determined to leave them what he could. But his father had so tied up the estates by the settlement he made on George's marriage and by his subsequent will that Daniel Craster was bound to inherit. It was only through the flaw of which we have already spoken that George was able to dispose of the house at Taplow and the copyhold lands in the county of Durham. These he devised to his mother for life; then to his aunt Wood, and finally to her elder son John. He could not touch the rest of the Craster properties unless Daniel should leave no male heirs, and, as there were already four sons, that contingency must have seemed a remote one.

[13] *The Diaries of a Duchess*, 1926, p. 131.

Nevertheless he provided by his will that, in such an event, his cousin John Wood or his male issue should inherit. And this actually came to pass.

Other cousins were not forgotten. Thomas Wood was left a legacy of £1,500. His sister Betty was given Olive's gold repeating watch. There were no young Mylotts to provide for; but George's other aunt, Elizabeth Blackett, had had by her second husband, John Watson of Goswick, a daughter named Bridget, who was now the wife of Mr. John Askew of Pallinsburn. Their son George was George Craster's godson, and his godfather left him his largest piece of silver, an epergne complete with saucers and candlesticks. The rest of the Craster diamonds, jewels, watches and trinkets were directed to go to Sir Robert Bewicke's three eldest daughters. John Wood was appointed executor to the will, and, after payment of the legacies and bequests there set out, was given the residue of George's personal estate.

The winter wore through. At the beginning of March George wrote out his final instructions to his executor. On May 9th, 1772, he died; and three days later he was interred, " in a grand manner " according to the local press, by Olive's side in the family vault at Embleton.

He was succeeded at Craster by his cousin. Daniel Craster moved in from Preston which had been his home for near twenty years past, and brought with him his wife, his four sons, his four daughters, and his old father, now turned ninety, a hale old man with rugged features, who had outlived three wives and of whom the tale goes that he would say, as he mounted his ancient nag, " Here we go, a hundred and twenty years together ". Of the rest of the family the story is soon told. George's mother returned from Tonbridge to London. She had a house there in Nassau Street, off Soho Square, as well as apartments in Windsor Castle, for George III had not as yet made Windsor his residence, and rooms there were granted out by royal favour. She survived her son by a bare five months and was buried in Taplow church, near to the spot where her husband and their young children

were lying. Aunt Mylott finally left Chester-le-Street and came to live with the Woods at Beadnell, where she died in 1781, leaving a chalice to the village church and a ghost to haunt the Hall. John Craster's last surviving sister, Anne Wood, lived on until 1796, dying at the ripe age of eighty-seven at Netherby, the home of her married daughter, Katherine Senhouse. Her son John married another Anne Craster, Daniel's pretty daughter, and in 1838 their elder son, Thomas Wood, succeeded under George Craster's will to the estates and name of Craster.