

SIR THOMAS ERPINGHAM, EAST ANGLIAN SOCIETY AND THE DYNASTIC REVOLUTION OF 1399

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SIR THOMAS ERPINGHAM is a minor national figure. He has a small but conspicuous part in Shakespeare's "Henry V": contemporaries, from ballad writers celebrating the victory of Agincourt to monkish chroniclers and members of the House of Commons, acknowledged his manly virtues.¹ Today his gate to the cathedral precinct with his image at the apex of the arch impresses the visitor to Norwich. From contemporaries to modern historians the adjectives applied to him are favourable, and an impression of a man of solid, particularly English, character accumulates. There is one dissonant voice and that a Frenchman's. Yet Erpingham was prominent in an especially sordid episode in our national history, the deposition of Richard II and the usurpation of the throne by Henry of Bolingbroke in 1399. Both at a national and a local level in these events Erpingham was active. What follows is an examination of how he was involved and how he was influential in this crisis in English history.

In 1380 Sir Thomas Erpingham became a member of the retinue of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. He was one of the duke's knights bachelor, serving him in war with one esquire, and receiving a retainer of £20 per annum. Thus it was that he saw active military service in Scotland in 1385 and Spain in 1386. By 1390 he had joined the personal entourage of Gaunt's son, Henry of Bolingbroke, Earl of Derby. In this year and in 1392 he accompanied the earl to Prussia to fight alongside the Teutonic Knights against the heathens. He also went with earl Henry on his unsuccessful pilgrimage to the Holy Land. When Henry was exiled by Richard II in 1398 Erpingham voluntarily shared his banishment with him. He was with Henry at Paris in June 1399 and witnessed a secret treaty between Henry and the Duke of Orleans. Shortly afterwards he embarked with Henry for England to try to regain the Lancastrian inheritance which Richard II had confiscated on the death of John of Gaunt in the previous February.² It was a risky undertaking: Henry's party was small and his exile had been extended to life. But the authority of Richard II collapsed. The nobility and gentry rallied to Henry, and he realized not only the Lancastrian inheritance but the crown itself lay within his grasp. Richard was made prisoner on his way from Conway to Flint for a personal interview with Henry. The ambush was arranged by the Earl of Northumberland and carried out by his men, though they were led by Sir Thomas Erpingham. The French chronicler reports that when Richard saw armed men swarming in the valley, Northumberland revealed his treachery, and:

"As he spoke, Erpingham came up with all the people of the Earl, his trumpets sounding aloud".

As Richard was brought to London key positions in the government were packed with Henry's supporters. On 21 August at Nantwich Sir Thomas Erpingham was made Constable of Dover Castle and Warden of the Cinque Ports. This was a vital position in view of anticipated French hostility to what was about to happen. When Richard was lodged in the Tower Erpingham seems to have been the first man specially charged with the king's custody. He was one of the representative group who, so the official Lancastrian version alleges, received the voluntary resignation of the crown by Richard in the Tower on 29 September, and, on 1 October conveyed to him the sentence of deposition made by the assembly at Westminster on the previous day. On the second occasion Erpingham represented "all the bachilers and commons of this londe be southe". Erpingham, like the other commissioners, could be trusted to ignore the difficulties which the captive king raised.³

Henry was now king. Sir Thomas Erpingham was immediately confirmed as Constable of Dover Castle and made the king's chamberlain. When Henry communicated with Convocation Erpingham was one of his agents, and when Henry rode from the Tower to Westminster for his coronation Erpingham carried the king's sword before him. On New Year's Day 1400 eleven men knelt before Henry IV and petitioned the king that Richard II be put to death: Sir Thomas Erpingham was one of them. Shortly afterwards Richard's supporters, the "duketti", at last rose in rebellion. Erpingham was one of the commanders of the vanguard of the army which Henry hastily assembled at London to suppress it. He was placed in charge of the execution of two of the rebels, Sir Thomas Blount and Sir Benedict Cely, and carried it out with the full barbarity which was permitted to him by law. The French chronicler alleges that Erpingham taunted and tried to interrogate Sir Thomas Blount while his bowels were being burnt before his eyes. Blount's retort may be quoted to counterbalance the generally favourable comment from English, pro-Lancastrian sources:

"Art thou the traitor Erpingham? Thou art more false than I am or ever was; and thou liest, false knight as though art . . . thou utterdest thy false spleen like a false and disloyal traitor; for by thee, and by the false traitor, the Earl of Rutland, the noble knighthood of England is destroyed. Cursed be the hour when thou and he were born. . . ."⁴

During the early years of Henry IV's reign positions of confidence and trust were showered on Sir Thomas Erpingham. In October 1401 he was appointed a guardian in England of the king's second son, Thomas, and in the following month nominated as a master for the Prince of Wales, though not chosen. He remained chamberlain until February 1404 when he was made steward of the royal household. He held this position until the following November. He attended meetings of the royal council, though he was never named as a councillor in parliament. In October 1404 he was appointed acting marshal of England. In 1407 he was an ambassador to France to treat for peace. At the same time he was one of the Prince of Wales' proxies for his marriage to a French princess should such a marriage be negotiated. The

following year saw him a conservator of the truce with Brittany. All this time he was still Constable of Dover Castle and Warden of the Cinque Ports. He was on the commission of the peace in Norfolk and in Kent, and he was nominated to many dozen royal commissions of both national and local importance.⁵

Such loyal service to the House of Lancaster was not just its own reward. Nomination to the Order of the Garter in 1400 was the most spectacular of royal favours shown to him, but it was not the most solid. Erpingham was still drawing the annuities of £20 and 40M. granted him by John of Gaunt from issues of the manor of Gimmingham. By grant of the same he also held the hundred of South Erpingham. From Henry, perhaps before he became king, he had 100M. annually from the manor of Saham in Cambridgeshire. On 11 May 1400 "for his good and gratuitous service" £80 yearly from the issues of Norfolk and Suffolk and £40 yearly from the fee-farm of Norwich were granted to him by the king. Only eight days after the death of Sir Nicholas Dagworth of Blickling on 2 January 1402 Sir Thomas Erpingham obtained by royal grant his annuity of 100M. from the fee-farm of Cambridge. All these were for life. In addition he had £300 a year for his constablership of Dover Castle, though this was no sinecure. Other royal favours included the custody of the lands of Sir John Clifton and the marriage of his heir, the grant of a tenement called "le Newe Inne" in London for life, the custody of the Duchy of Lancaster manor in Aylsham for life and, with others, the reversion of the castle and manor of Moresende. His wife Joan had the custody of the lands of Ralph Bray, with the marriage of his heir. Erpingham was also given royal permission to acquire the alien priory of Tofts and its associated manors. This list does not include the temporary interests which were acquired in some great estates in East Anglia, of which more later.⁶

Service to the House of Lancaster, and the Lancastrian Revolution especially, made Sir Thomas Erpingham a rich man. He began to add to his own quite modest inheritance in Norfolk which consisted of the manors of Erpingham and Wickmere. He purchased manors of the Dagworth and Felton inheritances.⁷

From the beginning Sir Thomas Erpingham had a vested interest in the maintenance of Henry IV's usurpation. He was at one with men like John Norbury, Henry's first treasurer, and Sir Thomas Rempston, his first steward of the royal household. These three had shared Henry's exile, the danger of his return, and the profits of his success. The bond between them was strong, a combination of comradeship and self-interest. Norbury and Erpingham corresponded in most friendly terms keeping each other closely informed of events at court and political developments. One surviving letter from Norbury ends:

"Autre chose escrire ne say au present, mès que toutesfois moy vuilléz certifier voz bons plesirs devers moy, queux je serra moult prest et joyous a parfournir a mon poair, priant a Dieu de vous ottroier entiere santee et joyeuse vie treslonguement a durer par sa seintisme grace. . . . Tout le vostre Johan Norbury".⁸

But the new régime was soon in financial difficulties, and the commons in parliament began to feel that this was a result of Henry being over-lavish in his grants of annuities and other royal favours and perquisites. In four successive parliaments (1402, January and October 1404, 1406) complaints against royal extravagance of this nature were raised. Yet in the Coventry parliament of 1404 and that of 1406 Erpingham was specifically exempted from the commons' criticism. On the first occasion they specifically recommended to the king:

"Monsieur Thomas de Erpingham, Monsieur Thomas Rempston, John Norbury, et les autres vaillantz Chivalers et Esquiers, qui leur mystrent en aventure ovesque nostre dit Seigneur le Roy a son venue en Engleterre".

In similar terms Sir John Tiptoft, the speaker in 1406, commended Sir Thomas Erpingham alone to the king, although he was certainly guilty of one of the sharp practices, that of immediately securing a royal annuity for himself on the death of the previous annuitant, which the commons in 1402 had condemned. His service to the King and the justice of the rewards he had received were never questioned. As will be shown Sir Thomas always had, and probably took care to have, personal friends in the House of Commons.⁹

County societies felt themselves to be distinct communities. In the case of the nobility and gentry this was much more than local patriotism: ties of blood, service and mutual interest bound them together. But occasionally the bonds were torn asunder and violence erupted. A dispute over property might effect this or divided political allegiances produced by a national crisis such as that of 1399. In Norfolk Richard II was not without supporters. There was Sir Simon Felbrigg of Felbrigg, King Richard's standard bearer, and Sir Nicholas Dagworth of Blickling, former diplomat and chamber-knight, who had been imprisoned for his membership of the court party in 1388. These were the most prominent among a sprinkling of Norfolk knights and squires who wore the livery of the White Hart. Henry Despencer, the Bishop of Norwich, had a long-standing grievance against the House of Lancaster, and was one of the few men who had responded to the Keeper's call to arms to resist the invasion by Henry Bolingbroke in 1399. With Bishop Despencer had ridden Sir William Elmham, a kinsman of the bishop by marriage and a member of Richard II's court circle. Like Dagworth he had been imprisoned in 1388. Elmham was lord of Westhorpe in Suffolk. If the Lancastrian régime was to establish itself securely such potential local opposition had either to be reconciled or crushed. It was in adjusting East Anglian society to the change of dynasty that Sir Thomas Erpingham was instrumental.¹⁰

Nevertheless, he started with certain advantages. The Duke of Lancaster was one of the foremost landowners in Norfolk, and thus among the gentry Henry IV had officials and annuitants of the Lancastrian estates who would almost automatically look to his leadership. Sir John White of Shotesham, Sir John Strange of Hunstanton and probably Sir Robert Berney of Gunton had all been members of John of Gaunt's retinue. They and their friends and relations would almost certainly be predisposed to accept the change of dynasty.

One of the great East Anglian nobles was Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk. He gave his support to Henry on his return from exile. The immediate effect was the loss of his title when Henry's first parliament restored the forfeitures of 1388. But in the same parliament, on 15 November 1399, "in consideration of his services after the King's advent", Henry IV restored him to the dignity of the Earl of Suffolk, and granted him the castle and honour of Eye. The king's request that this should be done was laid before parliament by Sir Thomas Erpingham.¹²

The Mowbray family had vast estates in East Anglia centred on Framlingham, and the Mortimer Earls of March held the remnant of the old honour of Clare. Both were potentially enemies of the House of Lancaster, but at the time of Henry IV's accession both heirs to these lands were minors, and thus their custody was in the king's hands. On 12 November 1399 Sir Thomas Erpingham received a royal grant of the constablership of Framlingham Castle for life, together with the profits of the parks pertaining to the castle. The manors of Framlingham, Kelsale and Earl Saham in Suffolk and Hanworth and Southfield in Norfolk were granted to him during the minority of the heir of Thomas Mowbray, late Duke of Norfolk on 5 December following. In 1400 the manors of Framingham (Norfolk) and Hoo (Suffolk) and the hundred of Loes (Suffolk), all part of the Mowbray inheritance, were committed to Erpingham, and he had an allowance of £40 a year for the constablership in addition to all the costs he might incur holding the manors.¹³

The heir of Duke Thomas was allowed to enter into his inheritance by Henry IV by 1404, and the Mowbray retainer John Lancastre became constable of Framlingham. In 1405 Mowbray joined the rebellion led by Archbishop Scrope, and they were executed together outside York on June 8. Sometime before this he had granted his manor of Hanworth to Sir Thomas Erpingham. The king confirmed Erpingham in possession of it on 11 June. Framlingham was now put in the possession of the king's son, Henry of Monmouth, but Erpingham was given custody of Little Framingham and Southfield. He held these until 1410. Hence the territorial power in East Anglia of the Mowbray family was for most of the reign in the control of supporters of the House of Lancaster: Erpingham alone at first and then he jointly with the king's son.¹⁴

The control of the Mortimer estates followed a similar pattern. On 17 November 1399 Erpingham was named as one of the five custodians appointed by the king to hold two-thirds of the estates throughout England and Wales of Roger late Earl of March during the minority of his heir. He remained a custodian until October 1401, though he had nothing to do with the Earl's Welsh lands. In September 1403 Erpingham had a royal grant of the office of chief keeper and surveyor of certain parks of the Mortimer estates in Suffolk, and on 12 November following the castle, town and lordship of Clare, and all other estates (with one exception) of the late Earl of March in Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk were placed in his keeping. He held these estates until 1409 when Henry of Monmouth succeeded him as their custodian.¹⁵

Two other advantages the Lancastrian cause enjoyed in East Anglia: the two county societies generally and the city of Norwich in particular were disenchanted with Richard II's government. Norfolk and Suffolk had been two of the sixteen counties which submitted to the king after the session of parliament held at Shrewsbury in 1398. They were excluded from the general pardon on the grounds that they had supported the Lords Appellant in 1388. The counties were forced to admit collective responsibility, petition for re-admission to the king's grace, and undertake to make fine with the king for their misdeeds. Only Essex is known to have paid its fine, but such an action on Richard II's part can only have increased the gentry's fear and resentment of his policy.¹⁶

Norwich had made no headway with Richard II in its attempts to secure a new charter. On hearing of Bolingbroke's return the city put itself in a state of armed readiness. The magistrates wrote to Henry referring to his father, John of Gaunt, as their special friend, and declaring openly for him against King Richard. They then explained their desire to become a shire incorporate. Henry, doubtless well advised, promised them their charter if ever it were in his power. During 1399-1400 Norwich lavished gifts upon Sir Thomas Erpingham "for bearing his good word to the King for the honour of the city and for having his counsel". Gifts continued in subsequent years until in 1404 their desired charter was granted. From the change of dynasty onwards the city regarded Erpingham highly and co-operated closely with him.¹⁷

The Bishop of Norwich was potentially formidable opposition. He disliked the change of dynasty, and he probably considered trying to raise East Anglia in favour of the "duketti" during their abortive rebellion in January 1400. One of them was his nephew. Bishop Henry frantically denied the rumours which someone was circulating at Court that he had attempted to raise

"grande semblé de chivalers et autres grandes gentz de pays pur faire alliance et confederacies pur estre avec les ditz seignurs rebelx encontre . . . le Roy".

He admitted that from his manor of South Elmham he had sent for "quatre ou cynk chivalers, et escuiers de les meillours de pais entour nous" when he heard news of the rebellion, but this was only to counsel them to be loyal and encourage others to be so. His actions were capable of a different interpretation, however, and it was Sir Thomas Erpingham who seized upon the bishop's suspicious behaviour, and attempted to make it grounds for his impeachment. He enlisted the support of the city of Norwich, and persuaded the bailiffs and seventy-four of the principal citizens at an assembly to affix the common seal of the city to the charges against Bishop Henry. Then in or before the parliament of 1401 Sir Thomas Erpingham laid them before the king. There was no need to go any further: the bishop had been badly scared, and henceforth resolved to accept the change of dynasty as God's will. It remained only to reconcile formally the two enemies in order to ensure local peace. On 9 February 1401 before the lords in parliament the king congratulated Erpingham on his wisdom and loyalty. He then rebuked the bishop, but pardoned him because of his noble birth, his position as a prelate of the realm, and because he expected

better behaviour in future. Then on the insistence of Archbishop Arundel Sir Thomas and Bishop Henry had to clasp each other's hand and give each other the kiss of peace "en signe d'amour perpetuel entre eux en tout temps advenir". The bishop gave no further trouble.¹⁸

The East Anglian gentry generally may have been predisposed towards the new dynasty, and Henry IV offered individuals the minimum of offence. Sir Nicholas Dagworth had his annuity confirmed by the new king (though he lost a tun of wine yearly from the king's prise in the port of Lynn), and so did his wife Eleanor, a lady of the Ricardian court. Sir William Elmham, though for a time under arrest and deprived of his weapons and horses, kept his royal grant of £100 a year, and its collection was facilitated by its transfer from the hands of the chamberlain of North Wales to the royal exchequer. Sir Edmund Noon of Shelfanger, Sir John Braham of Brantham (Suffolk) and Robert Buckton of Oakley (Suffolk), all retainers of Richard II, did not lose by the change of monarch. Sir Edmund Thorpe of Ashwellthorpe had his royal annuity doubled, and transferred from the exchequer to the customs of Bishop's Lynn, much nearer home. Thorpe's kinsmen by marriage, Sir John Howard, who appears to have lost his annuity in 1399, was the exception rather than the rule. Andrew Botiller of Great Waldingfield (Suffolk), an esquire of Richard II's household, became a king's knight under Henry IV receiving 40M. a year. This is, however, not surprising since he married Sir Thomas Erpingham's niece. He was to be Erpingham's deputy at Dover Castle, and eventually an executor of his will in 1428.¹⁹

Sir Simon Felbrigg, because of his closeness to Richard II, the king's standard bearer, nominated to the Order of the Garter in place of the executed Earl of Arundel in 1398, his wife a kinswoman of Anne of Bohemia, might have been expected to suffer. But his annuities received royal confirmation of 3 November 1399. He lost the constablerships of Framlingham (to Erpingham), Odiham and Llanbadarn castles, but he kept the alien priory manors of Letcombe Regis (Berkshire), Offord Cluny (Hunts.) and Manton and Tixover (Rutland). At first he had to render a further 40M. yearly for their possession, but on 8 September 1400 he was granted them free of any charge. Felbrigg did not hold any positions of high trust under Henry IV, though he may well have been in the service of Henry of Monmouth. His fairly painless survival of the change of dynasty was probably due to the influence of Sir Thomas Erpingham. The two men were life-long friends. They hailed from the same part of Norfolk; they saw military service together under John of Gaunt at Brest and in Spain; Sir Simon was a trustee for Sir Thomas in his lands when Erpingham accompanied Henry Bolingbroke into exile; they co-operated in the disposal of the wardship and marriage of the heirs of Sir John Clifton of Buckenham, to Sir Simon's advantage, though Sir Thomas had had the royal grant of them; when Erpingham drew up his will in 1428, Felbrigg headed the list of witnesses to it. Here it would appear that in 1399 ties of local friendship cut across the divisions of national politics, and the former proved the stronger.²⁰

A group of East Anglian gentry shot to prominence, power and profit with the revolution of 1399: all of them were associated with Sir Thomas Erpingham

before it. Sir John Strange of Hunstanton, one of Erpingham's trustees in 1398, was an old retainer of John of Gaunt. He became one of Henry IV's chamber knights, chief usher of the king's hall in 1402 and from 1408-13 controller of the royal household. Sir Robert Berney, another of Erpingham's trustees and his neighbour at Gunton, was his deputy at Dover Castle from 1400-06, sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk in 1406-07 and in 1410-11, and a J.P. in Norfolk from 1410 until his death in 1415. By 1403 Berney was receiving an annuity of £20 from the Duchy of Lancaster estates in Norfolk.²¹

Another neighbour and trustee of Erpingham was John Winter of Town Barningham. He was Sir Thomas's first deputy at Dover, before the formal deposition of Richard II, and on the day before this event he became steward of Cornwall "by the advice of the Duke of Lancaster". The Duchy of Cornwall was traditionally part of the endowment of the Prince of Wales, and thus Winter moved easily from his stewardship into the household of Henry of Monmouth. By 1403 he was receiver general of the prince and a controller of his household. He continued in the prince's service for the remainder of the reign. When Erpingham received the custody of Mowbray manors and of the lordship of Clare John Winter was on both occasions one of his sureties. In 1408 Winter was to become Duchy of Lancaster steward in Norfolk and Suffolk.²²

The friendship of Erpingham, Berney and Winter was particularly close and of long standing. In 1397 when William Winter, John's father, had drawn up his will, Erpingham and Berney had headed the list of supervisors. The other supervisors were Sir John White and Sir Ralph Shelton of Great Snoring. After the revolution of 1399 Shelton was attached to the royal household on Sir Thomas Erpingham's initiative. On 21 February 1401 Sir Ralph and his wife were granted two tuns of red wine of Gascony yearly from the king's prise in the port of Lynn: the order to the chief butler's deputy in Lynn to act upon this grant was warranted "by the king upon the information of Thomas Erpingham chamberlain". Later the accounts of the king's wardrobe show him receiving further royal gifts of wine.²³

Two other men may with certainty be added to the circle. John Payn as early as 1390 was butler of the household of Henry Bolingbroke. Like Erpingham, he shared Henry's exile and return, and became before Richard II's deposition chief butler of England and constable of Norwich castle. His tenure of both offices was confirmed immediately on Henry's accession to the throne. John Payn died suddenly in 1402. His wife was the sister-in-law of John Winter. A brother-in-law of John Winter and an executor of his father's will was John Reymes of Overstrand. Although he had gone to Ireland with Richard II in 1399, on his return he seems to have fled to the victorious cavalcade of Bolingbroke, where Erpingham, Payn and probably Winter were, and he was rewarded with an annuity of £10 out of the Lancastrian manor of Gimmingham. He became an esquire of the new king's household, received further annuities of £20 and £30, and three pipes of wine yearly from the king's prise in Great Yarmouth. He succeeded John Payn as constable of Norwich castle.²⁴

Among Erpingham's feoffees in 1398 were John Gurney of Harpley and John Yelverton, both of whom were locally important after 1399. John Gurney was twice appointed sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, in 1399 and again in 1408, and he was escheator in the same joint bailiwick in 1401-02. John Yelverton was recorder of the city of Norwich in 1403 and steward of Bishop's Lynn. Nicholas Wichingham, steward of the East Anglian lands of the Duchy of Lancaster during the first part of Henry IV's reign and sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk 1405-06, was closely connected with Erpingham. Twice Wichingham stood surety for him when he received royal grants, and Erpingham acted as a trustee for Wichingham in the manor of Upton. Also of the circle may have been Ralph Ramsey. Like Erpingham he was an old retainer of Bolingbroke, and after the revolution an esquire of the royal household and royal annuitant. He was twice sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, in 1403-04 and again 1408-09. He was influential in Great Yarmouth where he had been a bailiff. His wife was the daughter or sister-in-law of Sir Robert Berney's wife.²⁵

Sir Thomas Erpingham's own relations did very well out of the change of dynasty. He had, much to his regret, no sons or daughters of his own, but his sister Julian married William Philip or Phelip of Dennington in Suffolk and had two sons, William and John. The elder William Philip and his wife had a royal grant of two tuns of wine of Gascony yearly in the port of Ipswich in November 1401. The younger William Philip became an esquire of the royal household and began amassing various annuities and grants. He succeeded John Reymes as constable of Norwich castle in 1411, and by June 1408 he had married a daughter and coheirress of Thomas Lord Bardolf. John Philip had an annuity of £20 from the king (granted in 1406), but his main service was to Henry of Monmouth from whom he had 40M. a year. Erpingham thus had one nephew in the king's household and another in that of the heir apparent, an extremely useful situation in view of the rivalry which later developed between the king and his son.²⁶

Sir Walter Clopton of Clopton (Suffolk), probably the brother of Erpingham's first wife, and a relation of the chief justice of the King's Bench of the same name, became a king's knight in November 1399 with an annuity of £40. However, he died in 1400.²⁷

Everywhere after 1399, in the royal household, in the household of the heir apparent, in the administration of East Anglia, Sir Thomas Erpingham had close friends and relations. He seems to have been the centre of a web of influence and connexion stretching from the central government to local society, and binding them together. Most of the members of the network had profited by the change of dynasty, none had suffered unduly, all would wish to maintain the new regime.

Nothing shows more clearly the structure of local society, its integration, its inter-relations, sometimes of blood, sometimes of interest, sometimes of both, than the various land transactions by which the gentry sought to manipulate or evade the land law. Erpingham served at one time or another as a feoffee to uses of Sir John Strange, Sir Ralph Shelton, Sir Robert Berney, Sir Edmund

Thorpe, John Winter and John Gurney, among others. The services as feoffee of such an influential man after 1399 were constantly sought by his fellow gentry, but even before the dynastic revolution he was much engaged in these affairs. When Sir John Strange made a settlement of his manor of Hunstanton in 1390, Erpingham, Shelton, Gurney and Payn were among his feoffees. John Gurney's feoffees in a manor in Saxthorpe in 1406 were Erpingham, Berney, Shelton, Winter and John Yelverton. A charter of John Winter's in 1408 is witnessed by Erpingham, Sir Simon Felbrigg, Gurney and John Reymes. And so it goes on. Perhaps tedious in themselves these charters and quitclaims and the like reveal the close-knit nature of the Erpingham circle.²⁸

Perhaps the clearest indication of the dominance of the Erpingham circle in Norfolk society after 1399 is in the parliamentary representation of the county. The returns to nine of the parliaments of Henry IV are known, making eighteen places in all. Thirteen were occupied by men from the group named above. There is no indication that Sir Edmund Noon (one time steward of the household of prince Thomas of Lancaster), Sir Edmund Thorpe, Edmund Oldhall (Duchy of Lancaster receiver in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire) or John Wodehouse (Henry of Monmouth's steward at Castle Rising), who between them filled the other five places, were inimical to the interests of the group. Oldhall and Wodehouse at least may well have been members of it, and whatever their past all four were by this time good Lancastrians. In Suffolk Sir Andrew Botiller, Sir John Strange and Ralph Ramsey filled six places between them during the same reign.²⁹

When information as to the composition of the Norfolk county court making elections to parliament becomes available after 1406 men of the Erpingham circle figure prominently among the electors. Sir Ralph Shelton and John Reymes were present at the 1407 election. Sir Robert Berney was the returning sheriff, and Richard Gegg, who sealed the indenture of election, was a member of Erpingham's retinue on the Agincourt campaign and an executor of his will. In 1410 Berney, Shelton, Reymes and Gegg were among the witnesses to the election of John Winter and John Wodehouse as knights of the shire for Norfolk. Shelton's younger brother and John Winter's son were also present. Edmund Oldhall, who may have been a member of the group, was at both elections. Erpingham's friends were in a position not to dictate, but to influence, guide and direct the choice of the county court. After 1410 the presence of the group at elections is less marked though never absent.³⁰

The national crisis of 1399 might have produced divisions at a local level and consequent disorder similar to that later evidenced by the Paston Letters. That it did not do so in East Anglia was partly due to the increase in power which the Duchy of Lancaster estates gave the crown, partly due to the support for the new regime given by the Earl of Suffolk, and partly due to the manipulation of the situation by Sir Thomas Erpingham. Under the leadership of his circle Norfolk society at least, and possibly Suffolk too, had a cohesion which it was only to lose during the troubled times of Henry VI's reign. Erpingham's local reputation was such that reference was made to his career to date a matter in dispute as late as 1443. Erpingham was the reconciler of the gentry to the

Lancastrian dynasty and the great peace-maker in local troubles. Two of his letters during Henry IV's reign show him intervening in local disputes, one between William Milton, keeper of the spiritualities of the see of Norwich in 1406, and Edmund Grive, the other between the Markham family and the abbey of Bury St. Edmunds. Erpingham tries to arrange a temporary settlement in both cases, "tanque a ma venue en pais", "a ma procheine venue icelles", confident that he personally will be able to arrange a satisfactory solution. He continued in this role of local watchdog for trouble on behalf of the Lancastrian government for the remainder of his life. In 1420 he wrote urgently to the council warning them that Sir John Howard and Sir Thomas Kerdeston were about to attend an assize to settle a matter between them "with strong party on bothe sides as weel of lordys of estates as of othere gentilmen as knyghtis and squyers the whiche as me semyth is like to reyse and meve gret debate and riot". He then gave his advice as to the action the lords of the council should take. In one of the early Paston documents, dated 1424, he appears getting William Paston and Walter Aslak to refer their dispute to arbitrators. However, it seems that when Sir Thomas was involved in a dispute with the Earl of Arundel in 1414 over Litcham common he was not afraid to resort to extra-legal means.³¹

The remainder of Sir Thomas Erpingham's career is more famous and spectacular than in the early years of Henry IV's reign. His devotion to the House of Lancaster continued, but with characteristic shrewdness his personal service was transferred from the ailing Henry IV to the heir apparent, Henry of Monmouth. In 1409 as the prince began to assert himself Erpingham willingly surrendered his constablership of Dover castle and also the honour of Clare to him. But Sir Thomas's kinsman by marriage, Sir Andrew Botiller, continued as the lieutenant at Dover, a sign of how formal the change was. The prince granted Erpingham an annuity of £100. It is likely that he was out of favour when Henry IV re-asserted himself in 1411: information about him in royal records from then until the end of the reign is very thin.³²

On Henry V's accession he was immediately appointed steward of the royal household, on 23 March 1413. He held this position until May 1417. Sir Thomas was a knight banneret in the expedition to France in 1415. His retinue consisted of two knights, seventeen squires and sixty archers, very different from when he was a knight bachelor of John of Gaunt. He was a negotiator for the surrender of Harfleur, and commanded the archers at the battle of Agincourt. A French chronicle pictures the veteran Erpingham on horseback marshalling the archers into two wings, exhorting them to fight with vigour, then throwing his baton into the air and ordering the advance. As the battle was about to begin Sir Thomas dismounted and took his place alongside Henry V. The English victory was regarded by the Lancastrians as the divine confirmation of the usurpation of 1399, and must have brought deep personal satisfaction to Sir Thomas Erpingham.³³

In 1416 Erpingham was an ambassador to treat with the French, and in October of that year he welcomed the Duke of Burgundy to English territory

and conducted him to Calais to meet Henry V. In 1420 he was to describe himself as "an agid man evermore willing and desiryng the good pees reste and tranquillite of this realme and specially as in this contre (Norfolk) where my symple dwellyng ys". A little before this, however, it appears that he intended to strike one more blow against the French: two ships were ordered for his passage to Normandy in June 1420, but he did not go. He was still highly regarded by Henry V, having personal access to the king and being with him just before he left for France for, as it proved, the last time. Erpingham's nephew and heir, Sir William Philip, was also high in Henry V's favour: in 1418 he was nominated to the Order of the Garter, and in 1421 he became treasurer of the royal household. Sir John Philip, the other nephew, also highly esteemed by the king, had died in the royal army before Harfleur in 1415.³⁴

The death of Henry V in 1422 must have been a cruel blow to Erpingham longing as he was for "suche goode tyndyngs . . . oute of France and of other partyes the whiche were to me gret gladnesse joye et ese in herte for to here". The old warrior himself died in 1428, aged over seventy years, perhaps on that bed of silk which Sir William Philip was in turn to leave to his daughter.³⁵

Sir Thomas Erpingham made a mark in the national and local politics of his age which survived his death. He also made an impact on the architecture of Norfolk and Norwich, much of which still survives. The Erpingham Gate is only the most famous example. The church of the Dominican Friars, now St. Andrew's Hall, was rebuilt by him: his coat of arms appears between the clerestory windows on the exterior. At Erpingham itself he paid for the construction of the massive west tower of the church, and began considerable alterations and extensions. But what would have been his most fitting monument has not survived: the east window of the Church of St. Michael, Conisford. The inscription was:

"Mounsiour Thomas Erpyngham Chivalere ad fait faire ceste fenestre, al honnur de dieu et toutz Seyntes, en Remembraunce de tout les Seigneurs, Barones, Bannerettes, et Chivaleres que sont mortz sans Issu male, in les Countes de Norff. et Suff. Puist le Coronacion de noble Roy Edwarde le tierce. qe Fenestre fuist fait An: de Dieu MCCCCXIX".

The coats of arms of the various knights were portrayed in stained glass. Sir Thomas's were in the eighth pane. It indicates and symbolizes the unity of the warrior-landowning class of East Anglia of which Sir Thomas became a leader when that unity was imperilled by the dynastic crisis of 1399.³⁶

¹*Annales Ricardi Secundi* (ed. H. T. Riley-Rolls Series) p. 242. The St. Albans' Chronicler describes him as "miles famosus et optimus". R. H. Robbins: *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, p. 76—for his mention in a popular ballad on Agincourt.

²*John of Gaunt's Register 1379-83* (ed. E. C. Lodge and R. Somerville), pp. 17, 116; *C.C.R.* 1381-85, p. 557; *The Scrope-Grosvenor Controversy* (ed. N. H. Nicolas) II, pp. 194, 195; *Expeditions to Prussia and the Holy Land made by Henry earl of Derby* (ed. L. T. Smith), pp. 131, 133, 137, 265; J. H. Wylie: *The History of England under Henry IV*, I, p. 85n; *Annales Ricardi Secundi: loc. cit.*

³*Chronique de la traison et mort de Richard II . . .* (ed. B. Williams) p. 201; *C.P.R.* 1396-99, p. 592; *The Paston Letters* (ed. J. Gairdner) I, p. 47; *Rot. Parl.*, III, pp. 416, 422.

⁴*C.P.R.*, 1399-1401, pp. 78, 178, 185. Perhaps more accurately under-chamberlain (*Rot. Parl.*, III, p. 456). *Annales Ricardi Secundi*, pp. 289, 290, 291; *Chronique de la traison et mort de Richard II*, pp. 230, 237, 244, 245, 246.

⁵*C.P.R.*, 1401-05, p. 1; *P.P.C.*, I, p. 178; *B.I.H.R.*, XXXI, No. 83, p. 88; *C.P.R.*, 1401-05, p. 459; J. H. Wylie: *op. cit.*, III, pp. 50, 95; T. D. Hardy's *Syllabus of Rymer's Foedera*, p. 561; *C.P.R.*, 1399-1401, pp. 560, 561; 1401-05, p. 517; 1405-08, pp. 493, 494. J. L. Kirby: *Councils and Councilors of Henry IV*, pp. 61, 63 in T.R.H.S. 5th Series, Vol. 14.

- ⁸*The Register of Archbishop Chichele* (ed. E. F. Jacob) II, p. 651; *C.P.R.*, 1399-1401, pp. 93, 226, 274, 438; 1401-05, pp. 16, 47, 263, 471, 488. *Blomefield*, VI, p. 271.
- ⁹*C.C.R.*, 1396-99, p. 399 for his feoffment of Erpingham and Wickmere before accompanying Bolingbroke into exile; *ibid.*, 1405-09, pp. 279, 462 for his purchase of Blickling and a manor in Litcham.
- ¹⁰M. D. Legge: *Anglo-Norman Letters and Petitions*, pp. 404-405.
- ¹¹*Rot. Parl.*, III, pp. 553, 577.
- ¹²For Felbrigg—G. F. Beltz: *Memorials of the Order of the Garter*, p. 370. There are detailed accounts of the careers of Dagworth and Elmham in my "The Parliamentary Representation of Norfolk and Suffolk, 1377-1422", M.A. thesis Nottingham (unpublished) 1959. A copy is now in the Local History section of the Norwich Central Library.
- ¹³For White, Strange and Berney see my thesis.
- ¹⁴*Complete Peerage*, XII, Pt. I, p. 441. *Annales Ricardi Secundi*, p. 312.
- ¹⁵*C.P.R.*, 1399-1401, pp. 93, 224; *C.F.R.*, 1399-1405, pp. 31, 47, 62.
- ¹⁶*C.P.R.*, 1405-08, pp. 21, 86; *C.F.R.*, 1399-1405, p. 320.
- ¹⁷*ibid.*, pp. 22, 233; 1405-13, p. 150. *C.P.R.*, 1401-05, pp. 256, 326.
- ¹⁸M. D. Legge: *op. cit.*, pp. 11-13.
- ¹⁹*Blomefield*, III, p. 115; *Records of the City of Norwich* (ed. W. Hudson and J. C. Tingey), II, pp. 53, 55, 56, 58, 63.
- ²⁰M. D. Legge: *op. cit.*, pp. 113-15; *Blomefield*, III, p. 118; *Rot. Parl.*, III, p. 456.
- ²¹*C.P.R.*, 1399-1401, pp. 16, 35, 41, 47, 59, 93, 116, 129, 143, 206; 1401-05, p. 115; *Chronique de la traison et mort de Richard II*, p. 292; *Foreign accounts*, P.R.O. E.364/35 m. D; *Parliamentary writs and returns*, P.R.O. C.219/10/4; J. S. Roskell: *The Commons in the Parliament of 1422*, p. 192; *Reg. Chichele*, II, p. 380. With the exception of Howard, there are biographies of all these in my thesis.
- ²²*C.P.R.*, 1399-1401, pp. 12, 38, 64, 78, 224, 338, 525; *Records of the City of Norwich*, I, p. 278; II, p. 59; Beltz: *op. cit.*; *Reg. Chichele*, II, p. 381. The Clifton heir married a daughter of Sir Edmund Thorpe, a kinsman of Sir Simon.
- ²³*John of Gaunt's Register*, 1372-76, I, p. 346; 1379-83, I, p. 12; *C.P.R.*, 1401-05, p. 35; 1405-08, p. 444; *Accounts Various*, P.R.O. E. 101/404/21. Sir John Strange was also a J.P. in Norfolk from 1401 to 1407, and twice escheator of Norfolk and Suffolk (*C.P.R.*, 1399-1401, p. 561; 1405-08, p. 494; *C.F.R.*, 1399-1405, p. 234; 1405-13 p. 96). *C.C.R.*, 1399-1402, p. 170; *Parliamentary Writs and Returns*, P.R.O. C. 219/10/3; *C.F.R.*, 1405-13, pp. 52, 204; G. E. Morey: *The Administration of Norfolk and Suffolk in the reign of Henry IV*, p. 248 (unpublished M.A. thesis, London, 1941).
- ²⁴*Parliamentary Writs & Returns*, P.R.O. C. 219/10/1; *C.P.R.*, 1396-99, p. 595; 1399-1401, p. 1; 1401-05, p. 42; *Issue Rolls*, P.R.O. E. 403/576 m. 17. *Accounts Various*, P.R.O. E. 101/404/16. *C.F.R.*, 1399-1405, pp. 31, 233; R. S. Somerville: *The Duchy of Lancaster*, I, p. 594.
- ²⁵*Reg. Harsyke* (Norwich District Probate Registry) fo. 240. *C.P.R.*, 1399-1401, p. 433; *C.C.R.*, 1399-1402, p. 244; *Accounts Various*, P.R.O. E. 101/404/21, p. 50.
- ²⁶*Expeditions to Prussia and the Holy Land made by Henry earl of Derby . . . passim*; *C.P.R.*, 1396-99, pp. 524, 591, 595; 1399-1401, pp. 15, 133, 199, 393; 1401-05, pp. 29, 172. W. Rye: *Norfolk Families*, pp. 333, 731; *Reg. Harsyke: loc. cit.*, G. E. Morey: *op. cit.*, p. 289.
- ²⁷*C.F.R.*, 1399-1405, pp. 1, 31, 144, 231; 1405-13, pp. 130, 131; *Norfolk Archaeology*, XXVI, p. 2; *Parliamentary Writs and Returns*, P.R.O. C. 219/10/1 and 3; R. S. Somerville: *op. cit.*, p. 594; *C.P.R.*, 1399-1401, pp. 151, 479; 1401-05, p. 21; 1405-08, p. 295. *Accounts Various*, P.R.O. E. 101/404/21, p. 45; H. Manship and C. J. Palmer: *The History of Great Yarmouth*, II, p. 297; W. A. Copinger: *The Manors of Suffolk*, IV, p. 295.
- For biographies of Winter, Shelton, Payn, Reymes, Gurney and Ramsey see my thesis.
- ²⁸*D.N.B.*, XXII, p. 615; *C.P.R.*, 1399-1401, p. 179; 1401-05, pp. 89, 95, 184, 255; 1405-08, pp. 92, 140, 448; 1408-13, p. 278. *Accounts Various*, P.R.O. E. 101/404/21, p. 45. There is a biography of Sir William Philip in my thesis.
- ²⁹*C.P.R.*, 1399-1401, pp. 105, 393.
- ³⁰*C.C.R.*, 1389-92, pp. 331-332; 1405-09, pp. 522, 524; *C.P.R.*, 1446-52 pp. 464-465; *H.M.C.—Lothian MSS.* P. 53; *Blomefield*, V, p. 115; VIII, pp. 100, 123; IX, p. 256.
- ³¹*Official Return of Members of Parliament*, I, pp. 258, 261, 263, 265, 266, 267, 269, 270, 272, 274, 275, 277; J. H. Wylie: *op. cit.*, II, p. 133 n. 3; R. S. Somerville: *op. cit.*, I, p. 596; *C.P.R.*, 1422-29, pp. 68-69.
- ³²*Parliamentary Writs and Returns*, P.R.O. C. 219/10/4 and 5; *Reg. Chichele*, II, p. 380.
- ³³*Paston Letters*, I, pp. 12-18; M. D. Legge: *op. cit.*, pp. 384, 428-29; *P.P.C.*, II, pp. 272-73; *C.C.R.*, 1413-19, p. 146.
- ³⁴*C.P.R.*, 1408-13, pp. 57, 212; 1413-16, p. 404; *C.F.R.*, 1405-13, pp. 150-51.
- ³⁵*B.I.H.R. loc. cit.*: N. H. Nicolas: *The Battle of Agincourt*, p. 88; J. H. Wylie and W. T. Waugh: *The Reign of Henry V*, II, p. 49; J. de Waurin: *Recueil des croniques et anciennes istoires de la Grant Bretagne* (Ed. W. Hardy and E.L.C.P. Hardy-Rolls Series) I, p. 211.
- ³⁶*Reg. Chichele*, II, p. 651; J. H. Wylie and W. T. Waugh: *op. cit.*, III, p. 27; *C.P.R.*, 1416-22, p. 320; 1422-29, p. 112; H. A. Napier: *Historical Notices of Swyncombe and Ewelme in Oxfordshire*, p. 32. Erpingham and Sir William Philip were executors of Sir John Philip's will (*Reg. Marche* (Somerset House) fo. 43); Beltz: *op. cit.*, pp. clviii, lix.
- ³⁷ Sir Andrew Botiller acted as one of Sir William's proctors for his installation as a K.G.; *B.I.H.R.*, XXXI, No. 83, p. 91.
- ³⁸*P.P.C.*, II, pp. 272-73; *Reg. Chichele*, II, pp. 381, 601.
- ³⁹*Blomefield*, IV, pp. 86-87, 344; VI, pp. 411-12.