The Parish of Englishcombe

A HISTORY

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by

JEAN MANCO

Englishcombe Parish Council
1995

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DUCHY *of* CORNWALL

FOREWORD BY

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF WALES,

DUKE OF CORNWALL

I warmly applaud the initiative of the Parish Council in preparing this history of the parish of Englishcombe to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the formation of Parish Councils.

Within the Manor of Inglescombe the village has formed part of the Duchy of Cornwall since the first half of the 15th century and perhaps this continuity of stewardship has, in some small way, contributed towards the story that can be told and also the lessons that can be learned from the past.

It is always heartening to see a Parish Council fulfilling its duties with energy and enthusiasm, and I am sure that an initiative like this plays an invaluable role in drawing together local people and interests and thereby strengthening the feeling of community within the village, and the sense of belonging that people have to a particular place.

December 1995

Preface

In 1894 an Act of Parliament created the parish councils we have today. It seems appropriate to mark this centenary with a history of the parish. This has been a community project. Residents of long standing have contributed pictures, documents and valuable recollections of Englishcombe in the early decades of this century. More recent arrivals have guided the author round their historic buildings with great good will and helped with research, photography and art work.

Thanks are due particularly to Simon Adams, Rita Ashdown, Jan Bale, Edward Biggs, Barry Cox, Bill Davies, Veronica Dell, Liz Hall, Anne Hancock, Malcolm Hartley, Kathleen Harwood, David Lye, Carole Marjot, Bob Marjot, Ann Mounty, Angela Overton, Mike Overton, Hester Peach, Arthur Poole, Norman Pounds, Gerald Pow, Michael Pow, Norah Pow, Wendy Pow, Jane Rees, Mark Rees, Desmond Salter, Tony Salter, Ashton Scurlock, Ian Timmis, Jennie Walker, John Wroughton, Jill Wyatt, Leslie Wyatt and Richard Wyatt. We are also grateful for the interest and support of Avon County Council and the Duchy of Cornwall.

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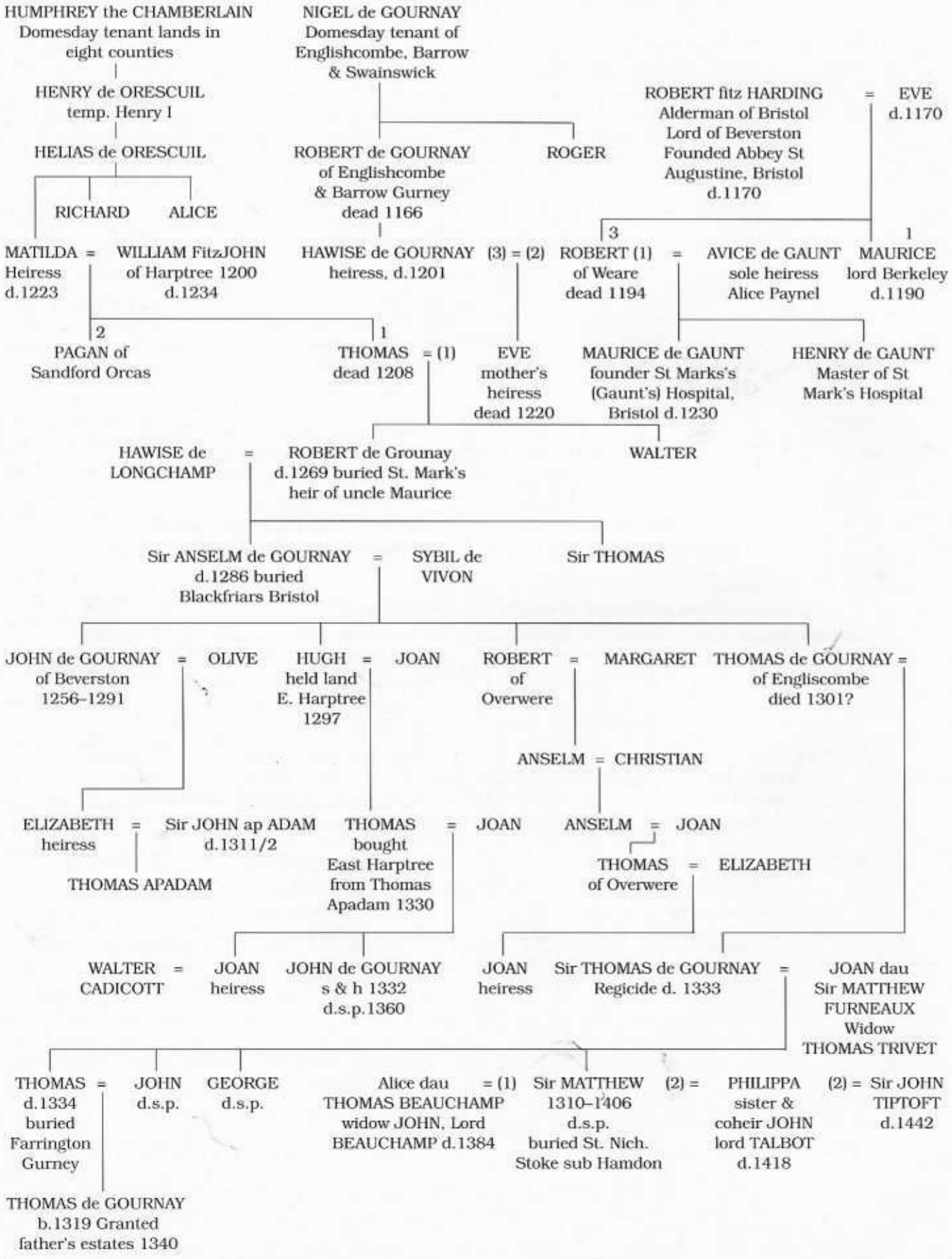
Much more of Englishcombe's past remains to be uncovered. Inevitably this account will have many omissions and perhaps some errors for future generations to correct. As we have followed in the footsteps of authors from the 18th century onwards who have explored the history of this parish, so we hope that others will build on our efforts.

Jean Manco
November 1995

GOURNAYS OF ENGLISHCOMBE



Englishcombe and the Gournays

Englishcombe now is part of the wide estates of the Duchy of Cornwall, held by the Prince of Wales, but it was not always a royal manor. When William the Conqueror ordered the Domesday survey in 1086, Englishcombe was held by Nigel de Gournay from the Bishop of Coutances.[1] Nigel must have come from Gournay, half-way between Paris and Dieppe, and his lands in Englishcombe, Twerton, Swainswick and Barrow Gurney had almost certainly been earned by fighting for William.

The next member of the family to appear in the records is Robert de Gournay, who held his lands from the Earl of Gloucester.[2] It was probably Robert who built the church at Englishcombe, parts of which are Norman. We may guess that he had a house close by. Robert was dead by 1166, leaving only a daughter Hawise to inherit his lands.[3] The turbulent years of civil war between King Stephen and the Empress Maud (1136-53) had taken a heavy toll. Perhaps Hawise had brothers who died fighting for Maud's half-brother and staunch supporter, Earl Robert of Gloucester.

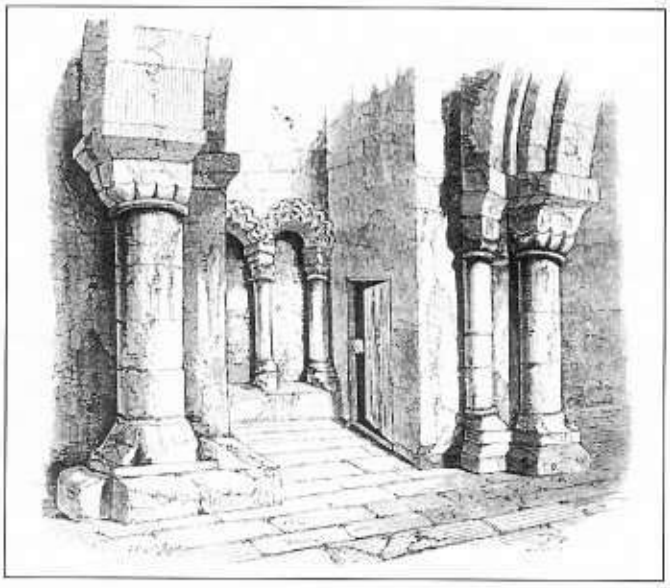


Plate 1 – Norman arches in Englishcombe Church. Engraving by E. Evans from Record of the House of Gournay *(1848).*

Hawise certainly lost her husband Roger de Baalun and their son Roger in Stephen's reign. For their souls she granted the church of Englishcombe in 1166 to the Priory of St Saviour in Bermondsey, Surrey.[4] The de Baalun family had been benefactors to Bermondsey from 1092, but so distant a priory would find it difficult to collect the tithes and in 1239 the Bishop of Bath decreed that Bath Priory should hold the church of Englishcombe, paying a cash rent to Bermondsey.[5] Hawise probably also founded the convent at Barrow Gurney.[6]

Hawise re-married twice. Her third husband was Robert of Weare, who was clearly fond of hunting for around 1190 he created parks at Englishcombe and Barrow Gurney surrounded by deer leaps.[7] He was a son of Robert fitz Harding, Gloucester's chief supporter in Bristol. This city was a stronghold of the Empress Maud, where her son, the future Henry II, spent his boyhood. When he came to the throne, Henry rewarded fitz Harding with Berkeley Castle, confiscated from a supporter of Stephen. Fitz Harding's eldest son was the first of a long line of lords Berkeley, while his third son, Robert of Weare, married two heiresses in succession. Robert's first wife, Alice de Gaunt, gave him two sons who took her surname.[8]

By Hawise de Gournay Robert had a daughter, Eve, heiress to the Gournay lands. She married the heir to greater estates. Eve's husband Thomas was the son of William fitz John of Harptree[9] and Maud de Orescuil, the co-heiress of manors in Gloucestershire, Somerset and Dorset.[10] Thomas died before his parents, so it was his son Robert de Gournay II who was the eventual heir to estates which gave him baronial rank.

Robert de Gournay II inherited Englishcombe and Barrow Gurney from his mother before 1220, while he was still under age.[11] Then in 1230 his uncle Maurice de Gaunt died, leaving Robert heir to Weare, Somerset and Beverston, Gloucestershire, among other manors. Maurice had earlier built St Mark's (Gaunt's) Hospital at Bristol, as a charity run by the nearby Abbey of St Augustine. He intended it to feed 100 of the poor every day. Maurice was buried in the chapel of St Mark's and Robert promptly confirmed his uncle's endowment. Shortly afterwards he made St Mark's an independent foundation and appointed his uncle Henry de Gaunt its first master.[12]

The greatest increase in Robert's estates came on the death in 1234 of his grandfather William of Harptree. Along with Harptree came a large part of the Orescuil inheritance, including Farrington,

which became known as Farrington Gurney.[13] Most of Robert's newly-acquired manors were knight's fees; they had been granted at various times to fighting men in return for service to their lord in war and castleguard in peace-time. Robert de Gournay II therefore had a force at his command, which could be used to garrison his castles at Beverston and East Harptree. It was probably he who built a stone castle at Englishcombe.[14]

When Robert de Gournay died in 1269, he was holding 23 knight's fees from the Earl of Gloucester, as well as two manors from the Earl of Warwick, one from the bishop of Worcester and four directly from the king.[15] He chose to be buried alongside his uncle Maurice in the chapel of St Mark's Hospital (now the Lord Mayor's Chapel, College Green, Bristol). Their tomb can still be seen there with effigies of them both in chain mail.

Robert's heart was buried in another family foundation, the Dominican Friary at Bristol.[16] The zealous Dominican Order was gaining favour with benefactors at this time. Founded by St Dominic,

Plate 2 – Effigies of Robert de Gournay and Maurice de Gaunt on their monument in the Lord Mayor's Chapel, College Green, Bristol. Engraving by E. Evans from Record of the House of Gournay *(1848).*

they first settled in England in 1221, with the aim of teaching and preaching. Their house in Bristol (now Quakers Friars) was founded around 1227 by Matthew de Gournay.[17] Matthew appears as a witness on charters of Hawise de Gournay and was probably her cousin.[18]

Plate 3 – Seal of Sybil de Gournay, wife of Sir Anselm. Engraving by E. Evans from Record of the House of Gournay *(1848).*

Robert's heir was his eldest son, Anselm. Sir Anselm de Gournay was summoned in July 1277 by Edward I to serve in his invasion of Wales, but was permitted a respite until Michaelmas (29 September), by which time Prince Llywelyn had surrendered. When the Welsh rose against Edward in 1282, Sir Anselm was summoned again, but chose to commute his obligations to the cash equivalent.[19] He may have already been ailing and unable to fight personally, for he died in 1286. In his will he asked to be buried in the church of Friars Preachers (the Dominican Friary), Bristol. Beverston Castle with the major part of his lands went to his eldest son John, aged 30, but Anselm made provision in his lifetime for his younger sons Hugh, William, Robert and Thomas.[20] Thomas was granted West Harptree for a rent of a dozen quarrels (cross-bow bolts) and the manors of Englishcombe and Farrington Gurney each for a rose rent.[21]

Sir Thomas de Gournay was summoned almost continuously to fight in Edward I's wars against the Welsh (1295), the French (1297) and the Scots (1300, 1301.) The fact that he was not summoned when Edward invaded Scotland again in 1303 suggests that he had died in the previous campaign.[22]

His son and heir, another Sir Thomas, was the most notorious of the Gournays of Englishcombe. Already in 1314 he was showing the streak of ruthlessness that brought about his downfall. He and his cousin Anselm de Gournay raided a farm at Langridge, near Bath, knowing the owner to be a prisoner in Scotland, and stole his horses and farm animals.[23] Like his father, he fought the Scots, being summoned by Edward II in 1316. He went to Ireland the following year, but in 1318 he was in

trouble again, this time for hunting in the Earl of Pembroke's park at Painswick, Gloucestershire.[24]

Pembroke was the head of a moderate party trying to keep the peace between the king and his over-mighty cousin Thomas, Earl of Lancaster. Edward II's pampering of favourites was making him increasingly unpopular. In the spring of 1321, the greed and arrogance of Edward's adored Hugh Despenser provoked a rebellion backed by the Earl of Lancaster. Thomas de Gournay took part and in December his lands were confiscated and there was a warrant for his imprisonment.[25] By February 1323 he was a prisoner in the Tower of London, but he bought his life and his release with a bond for £100 on 1 July 1324. His lands were restored later the same month.[26] Roger Mortimer, one of the rebel leaders, had managed to escape from the Tower and flee to France.

Queen Isabella bitterly resented her husband's devotion to Despenser and by 1325 had turned to Roger Mortimer for consolation. In September 1326 she and Mortimer invaded England. Despenser was hanged and the king imprisoned. Edward II was deposed in January 1327; Isabella ruled in the name of her son, the young Edward III. But while the former king lived, there could be no real security for Isabella and Mortimer and they resolved on desperate measures. Edward II was moved to Berkeley Castle and placed in the custody of Sir Thomas de Berkeley. Berkeley, perhaps fearing to be implicated in regicide, pleaded illness to remove himself to a safe distance, leaving Sir Thomas de Gournay and William de Ocle in charge of the former king. In September 1327 Edward II was murdered.

Sir Thomas de Gournay had powerful motives. He was deeply in debt, having still not redeemed the £100 bond for his release in 1324, or another £100 bond extorted from him by Hugh Despenser the elder, father of Edward's favourite. In October 1328, both debts were pardoned.[27] Around the same time Isabella appointed Thomas constable of Bristol Castle, where the Despenser heir was in custody.[28] But the tide of de Gournay's fortunes changed dramatically after Edward III wrested power from his mother and Mortimer in October 1330. Already in September 1330 Parliament had judged Thomas de Gournay and William de Ocle guilty of regicide; the king offered £100 for the capture of Thomas alive or 100 marks for his head.[29] In December warrants were issued for the arrest of Thomas de Gournay and his accomplices before they could escape abroad, but Thomas slipped through the net. He seems to have sailed secretly from Mousehole in Cornwall to Spain, but he was arrested in Burgos in May 1331.

The king sent his servant Giles de Ispannia to bring de Gournay back to England. The name 'de Ispannia' suggests that Giles was of Spanish ancestry, but this evidently cut no ice at the Spanish Court. While Giles was being delayed for months with polite evasions, de Gournay escaped. But his luck was not to last. News reached Edward III in January 1333 that the fugitive had been arrested at Naples. This time the king sent a Yorkshire knight, Sir William de Thweng. When Sir William reached Naples he must have found de Gournay in tatters; he had to buy new clothes and shoes for him. Clearly Edward III's instructions were to bring de Gournay back alive, but the rigors of the journey were severe. Sir William sailed from Naples to the neighbourhood of Perpignan, where he set out to English-held Bayonne on horseback. Perhaps he strayed too close to the Spanish border, for they were captured by some Aragonese. There was a forced detour to Montblanch north of Tarragona, where de Gournay needed physicians and medicine. The King of Aragon mercifully had them set free and escorted safely to the border; once over the Pyrenees they travelled by boat down river to Bayonne. By then de Gournay was seriously ill. He was treated by two physicians, but he was beyond their help. It was his body that Sir William finally bore back to England in July 1333.[30]

Meanwhile Sir Thomas's lands were taken into the king's hands, but his wife Joan was granted West Harptree for the support of herself and her children and Englishcombe and Farrington at a yearly rent of £24.[31] On 30 December 1334, Sir Thomas's eldest son was summoned to join Edward III's forces at Roxburgh. Having the same name as his father, it seems he was killed by some hot-heads on his own side, who thought he was the regicide.[32] His tomb stood in the old church at Farrington Gurney, which was demolished in 1843.[33] In November 1339 his son and heir, another Thomas, who was nearly of age, petitioned for the return of the forfeit estates. Perhaps the king felt the family had suffered enough, for he consented.[34]

In 1340 Matthew, the youngest son of Thomas the regicide, was at the battle of Sluys. It was the start of a glorious career as a soldier of fortune. He joined the siege of Moorish Algeciras by Alfonso XI of Castile (1342-4); he was at Crecy (1346) and Poitiers (1356); joining the Black Prince he fought at Najara (1367) and was made a baron of Guienne.

In 1378 he came under siege while governor of Bayonne and in 1388, aged 78, he was constable of the forces of Edward, Earl of Cambridge in his expedition to Portugal. His sword and armour were treasured relics to later generations of fighting men, but the greatest testimonial to his strength and skill on the battlefield is that he died in his bed aged 96.[35]

Sir Matthew outlived his nephew Thomas de Gournay and his brothers John and George, who all died without surviving issue, so the manors of Englishcombe, Farrington Gurney and West Harptree descended to him. He also acquired another ten manors in Somerset and one in Dorset, five of them on his marriage in 1374 to Alice, sister of Thomas, Earl of Warwick.[36] Perhaps his favourite of these was Stoke sub Hamdon, Somerset, where he chose to be buried.[37] Though 74 years old when Alice died in 1384, Sir Matthew took as his second wife Philippa, one of the daughters of Sir John Talbot of Richard's Castle, a girl of 15 at that time but already a widow.

The old warrior had no children, so he arranged for all his properties in England and Aquitaine to be held by Philippa for life.[38] His death in August 1406 left her a wealthy widow -- a prize in whose disposal the king had an interest. By May 1407, Philippa was the wife of Sir John Tiptoft, an able but landless man. In 1406 Tiptoft was elected Speaker of the House of Commons and pressed the king tactfully towards reforms. From 1408-9 he was Treasurer of the Exchequer. His marriage brought him great estates and changed the course of his career. In February 1408 he was appointed Seneschal of the Landes and Constable of Dax, Aquitaine, both posts previously held by Sir Matthew Gournay.[39] After Philippa died in 1418, Tiptoft continued to hold Sir Matthew's former estate, but sold the inheritance of it to the Crown for £4,000.[40]

Barrow, Haycombe and Inglesbatch

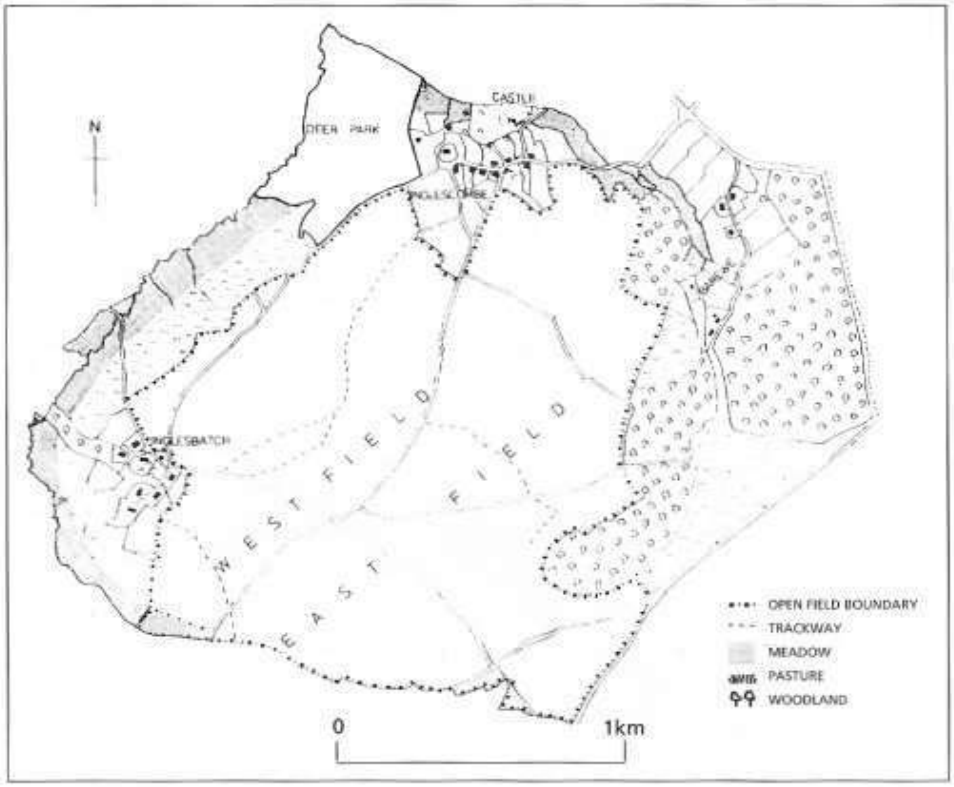


Fig 1 – Reconstruction of Englishcombe in the medieval period (by Avon County Council planning department.)

Englishcombe was typical of the villages that developed in the late Saxon period over a large part of England. The arable land of the manor was in two large open fields, which were cultivated in rotation.[41] Each field was divided into strips allocated by the lord to himself and his tenants. As a rule with this type of farming, the tenants lived in cottages clustered around the manor house and church. Most of them were copyholders, who held their land in return for work on the lord's. They could not sell it or bequeath it, though in practice, lands often did pass from father to son. A freehold tenant was more secure, holding land from the manorial lord for a fixed rent, and free to dispose of it by deed or will. Naturally it was the less profitable marginal land that was most likely to be granted to freeholders. The pattern of early deeds for Englishcombe is interesting, showing clusters of freehold land in Barrow, Haycombe and Inglesbatch. These outlying farms or hamlets have their own history.

The field-name Brightwick in Haycombe probably records a Saxon dairy-farm. Barrow has all but vanished, but archaeologists have uncovered the remains of a medieval settlement. It stretched from the site of Culverhay School south to the Wansdyke.[42] By the time Englishcombe was first mapped in 1742 (pl. 4), all that remained was Barrow House (close to the present Barrow Castle). Haycombe and a large part of Barrow lay outside Englishcombe originally; in 1316 'Bergh' was considered a hamlet of Twerton.[43] Early boundaries often followed streams; Newton and Widdlecombe Brooks mark the western limit of Englishcombe. To the north and north-east the natural boundary between Englishcombe and Twerton would be Padley Brook. Beyond Padley Brook, a strip of freehold land on the margin of Twerton evolved into Barrow, Haycombe and Claysend Farms. Originally their lands were much intermixed and included strips in the open fields of Englishcombe and Twerton. By 1611 Englishcombe manor included Barrow land east of Padley Brook and by the 18th century the parish of Englishcombe had absorbed Barrow and Haycombe Farms.[44] Since they both had land at Stirtingale in Twerton, that too came into the parish.

In 1452 Richard (later Sir Richard) Choke bought Barrow Farm for £100; the property was described as two houses and 180 acres in Twerton, Englishcombe and 'Berewe near Bath', and owed an annual rent of a pound of pepper to the lord of Twerton. Two years later Choke bought the manor of Long Ashton near Bristol, which became the chief house of his widespread estate. The wealth that he poured into property was made as a justice of the common pleas, perhaps not entirely honestly. Sir Richard certainly seemed anxious to provide for the welfare of his soul. Before he died in 1483, he founded a chantry in the church of Long Ashton, where his tomb still stands, and endowed it with

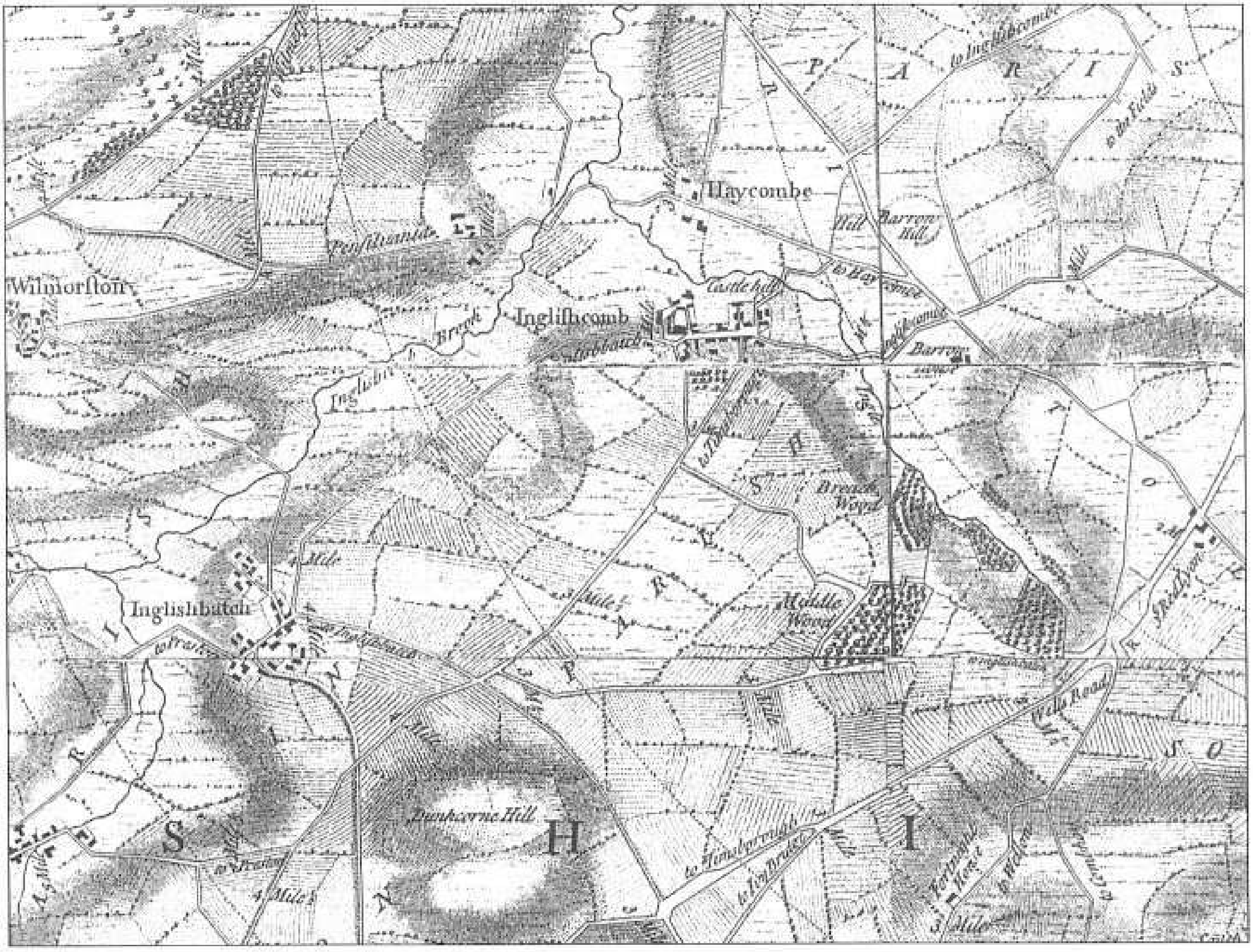


Plate 4 – Detail from Bath and Five Miles Round *surveyed in 1742 by Thomas Thorpe.*

lands including Barrow Farm.[45] After the dissolution of the chantries, Barrow Farm was bought from the Crown by John Smythe, the Bristol merchant who had purchased Ashton Court. His son Hugh sold it to John Gay of Englishcombe in 1568. Barrow Farm belonged to Richard Gay of Newton St Loe by 1626.[46]

Haycombe was farmed by Richard Gay of Englishcombe at this time, probably a cousin. Claysend and Haycombe Farms were one property in 1442, leased to John Cleye, with land in Newton St Loe, Twerton and Barrow. It was sold in 1550 to David Baber of Twerton and Richard Gay of Englishcombe. The Babers lived at Claysend in Newton St Loe, while the Gay family farmed Haycombe, but the two farms were not formally divided until 1672.[47] After the deaths of John Gay in 1729 and his young son Richard in 1736, Haycombe Farm went out of the Gay family and was owned by Sarah Hallet in 1840.[48]

Richard Gay sold Barrow Farm in 1641 to Thomas Cox; his son Richard sold it in 1695 to Joseph Langton of Newton Park, whose descendants held it until the late 19th century. Since Barrow Farm had land at Haycombe and vice-versa, there was an exchange in 1705 between Langton and Richard Gay of Haycombe to simplify the process of enclosure. This still left their land much intermixed, so it is not surprising that in the 19th century Haycombe and Barrow were farmed together, although still in separate ownership. The tenant farmer in 1840 was James Harris, who lived at (old) Haycombe Farm; Barrow House was deserted sometime after 1792.[49]

Medieval deeds survive for three Inglesbatch properties. William de St Loe had a house at Inglesbatch c1290, which was sold shortly afterwards to Henry de Littleton. The heir of the Littletons sold it to Sir James Hussey of Bathampton in 1357 and it then descended to the

Plate 5 – The old Haycombe Farm was rebuilt in 1766, as recorded on the date stone. It is now divided into Haycombe House and Inglescombe House

Blount family.[50] Meanwhile another property found its way into the same hands by another route. William Cherm held a house and land in Inglesbatch in 1305, which descended through the Forde family to the Blounts.[51] In 1445 Willelma Blount leased the first of these properties to Walter Collins; then in 1448 she leased the other to Thomas Gravell.[52] The Collins and Gravell families were still leasing these lands in 1611 (app.3), long after the Blount property had been sold to William Button.[53] By 1717 the two Button tenements were leased by Robert and Benjamin Wyatt (app.7). The Button lands descended to the Walker-Heneage family. In 1792 John Walker Heneage owned two farms in Inglesbatch; one is now known as the Home Farm, while the other had a farmhouse (since demolished) on the left-hand side of the road to Wilmington.[54]

Another series of deeds is for a smallholding with a mill. Robert of Farrington gave a sparrow hawk for a house and land in 'Inglescumb' in 1287; later deeds make it clear that this was in Inglesbatch. By 1359 his son Thomas had also acquired Inglesbatch mill, first mentioned around 1250.[55] The mill seems to have gone by the time the Farrington property descended to William Tomkins, who was dead in 1580. It seems he had no sons, for his farm was divided in that year between Thomas Raynes, John Evans and Roger Hunt alias Baggridge, probably his sons-in-law. Presumably Raynes had the bulk of the house, since it became known by his name (app.3). Baggridge took the wellhouse and kitchen, with lofts over the kitchen and entry.[56] By 1626 Richard Lane had land at Inglesbatch, probably Raynes's, since in 1700 Peter Lane possessed the entry, the hall and the buttery of a large house at Inglesbatch long since partitioned.[57] Baggridge's property passed to Samuel Day, who in 1792 owned a house and farm buildings on the site of Allandale.[58]

The Clement family were the most prosperous of the tenant farmers of Inglesbatch in the 16th and

Plate 6 – Allandale with Sarah Adams and her daughter Daisy in 1995. The carpenter George Milsom lived here in the 19th century.

17th centuries. They must have lived at the house now called the Close, tenanted by their descendants the Halls in the 18th century.[59] Thomas Clement leased Barrow Farm in 1572, presumably to provide for his son Richard, who was included in the lease.[60] It is clear that he also leased the Rectory Farm and the tithes, since his will in 1586

Plate 7 – The Close – the home of the Clements in the 17th century, now part of Inglesbatch Farm. The house is of mixed dates, the rear being probably 17th-century and the front Georgian.

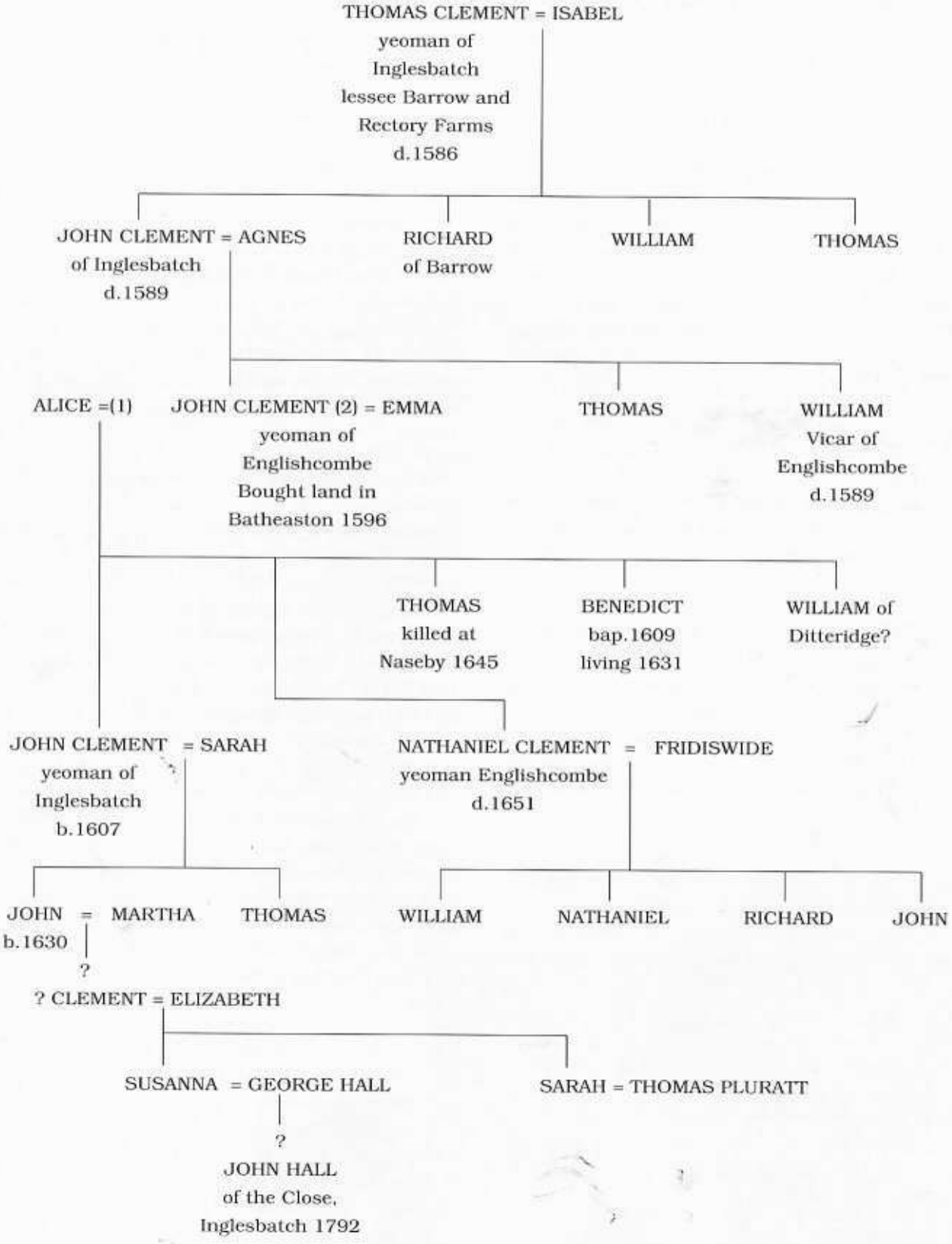
left certain tithes to his son William. Thomas's other bequests illustrate the living standards of a successful Elizabethan yeoman. Apart from farm stock and implements, he owned a bedstead with curtains, a cupboard, a great crock, a pair of hand-irons, a great and lesser coffer and silver spoons. The Clements could afford to educate a younger son for the church. Thomas's grandson William studied at Oxford and became vicar of Englishcombe in July 1588. Sadly he and his father John both fell ill and died the following year. John also bequeathed tithes, so he had evidently taken over the Rectory Farm. William Clement's will demonstrates a cleric's love of books. He had spent the then considerable sum of £4 on a bible and other works. Another bible was left to his sister-in-law Alice.[61]

From 1674 the small copyhold properties in Inglesbatch were gradually amassed by the Day family. John Day first acquired the Beene's Upper House and Lower House and later Elford's farm. All three houses have now been demolished but can be seen on Greenwood's map to the north-west of Inglesbatch (pl.10). Thomas Day built a mansion c1790 between the roads to Wilmington and

Plate 8 – Inglesbatch Farm, built by Thomas Day in the late 18th century. It was extended and re-fronted in 1869, as shown by a datestone with the crest of the Prince of Wales.

Englishcombe, while Thomas Day jr took over what had been Evans's farm, with a house in the corner of the road turning to Priston Mill.[62] In the 19th century Thomas Day also took over the Close. The Days had built up a sizable property, now known as Inglesbatch Farm. At least one member of the family was Roman Catholic -- Capt. John Day of the 49th foot. His son John, born in 1826 at the Hague and educated partly at Downside, became a judge of the Queen's Bench.[63]

THE CLEMENTS OF ENGLISHCOMBE



The Duchy of Cornwall

It will be remembered that Henry V had purchased the reversion (inheritance) of the estate of Matthew de Gournay in 1418, so on the death in January 1443 of Sir John Tiptoft, it fell to the Crown. In February Henry VI appointed Thomas Young as steward of his newly acquired estate: the manors of Stoke sub Hamdon, Milton Fauconberg (near Martock), Midsomer Norton, Stratton on the Fosse, Farrington Gurney, Welton, Englishcombe, Widcombe (near Harptree), Laverton, Shepton Mallet, Curry Mallet and West Harptree in Somerset and Ryme in Dorset.[64]

These manors immediately became part of the Duchy of Cornwall, since in 1421 Henry V had granted the Duchy the reversion of the Gournay estate.[65] The Duchy of Cornwall was created by Edward III in 1337 for the support of his eldest son, the Black Prince. Since then every eldest son of the reigning monarch has succeeded to the Duchy. When the sovereign has no son, it is held by the Crown. In 1443 Henry VI was still childless, so the estate was in Crown hands. In fact the question of the succession had become a pressing problem, with factions forming around the rival claims of the Dukes of York and Somerset. Henry favoured Somerset, as shown by the grant of the former Gournay estate in October 1444 to Somerset's brother and male heir, Edmund Beaufort, Marquis of Dorset.[66]

The birth of Henry VI's only son, Edward, in October 1453 should have settled the succession, but the king was by then insane and incapable of governing. In the struggle for power that followed, Edmund Beaufort, by then Duke of Somerset, was killed. His widow Eleanor surrendered the Gournay estate to the Crown in 1457.[67] The Prince of Wales had little opportunity to oversee his Duchy. When Prince Edward was only 7 years old, his father was deposed. Henry VI's restoration to the throne in 1470 lasted only a few months and ended with the death of the Prince of Wales at the battle of Tewksbury.

Meanwhile in Englishcombe, these stirring events probably produced only faint ripples. When Edward IV seized the throne from Henry VI in 1461, he lost no time in appointing a new steward to the Gournay estate.[68] He also rented the farm of Englishcombe to his own men.[69] In 1464 Edward IV granted the Gournay estate to his brother George, Duke of Clarence,[70] but all Clarence's estates were forfeit when Edward was deposed in 1470. By the time Edward returned to the throne in 1471, he had a son and heir, another Edward. By Act of Parliament in 1472-3, Edward IV invested the new Prince of Wales with the Duchy of Cornwall, including 'all the castles, manors and lands which were of Matthew de Gournay in Somerset and Dorset'.[71]

This Prince Edward was no more fortunate than his predecessor; he was murdered in the Tower of London. During the prince's brief life he was given the additional title Earl of Pembroke, taken from William Herbert, who was created Earl of Huntingdon in compensation. There was an exchange of lands; castles in Wales became part of the Duchy, while the Gournay estate went to the new Earl of Huntingdon in 1482.[72] Huntingdon died in 1491, leaving a daughter Elizabeth. By the terms of the exchange, the Gournay estate was hers. However, Henry VII argued cannily that since his uncle Jasper, Duke of Bedford, now held said castles in Wales, it was against all reason and conscience that his son Arthur, Prince of Wales, should not have the Gournay estate. (Jasper Tudor had held the title Earl of Pembroke before Herbert and was restored to it on the accession of Henry VII.) The Act of 1482 was therefore declared void and the Gournay estate returned to the Duchy in 1495.[73]

Prince Arthur's early death in 1502 made his younger brother Henry Prince of Wales; in 1509 he ascended the throne as Henry VIII. After that there was no Prince of Wales until the birth of Prince Edward in 1537. No doubt Henry became used to treating the Duchy as his own. In 1543 he sold four of the ex-Gournay manors: Englishcombe, Widcombe, Laverton and West Harptree.[74] It was 66 years before the Duchy clawed them back.

William Crouch MP

It was while Englishcombe was still in the hands of the Crown that William Crouch made his home there. Crouch was a quarrelsome, grasping, ruthless man, who disrupted the economy of Bath and yet became its MP. He first appears as a Crown servant. In 1524 he was appointed bailiff of Sherston, Wilts. The following year he was granted a 21-year lease of the Duchy manor of Laverton.[75] In June 1527, Henry Norris, squire of the body to Henry VIII, was granted a lease of the lordship of Englishcombe.[76] It was around this time that Crouch settled at Englishcombe;[77] probably Norris, a permanent member of the royal household, employed Crouch as his steward.

Crouch was taken into the service of the Prior of Bath, William Holloway, where he cast an acquisitive eye over priory property. The rectory of Englishcombe had been let, but Crouch was able to buy the reversion (inheritance) of the lease.[78] He also bought the reversion of the lease of Wellow rectory from the Abbot of Cirencester. Shortly afterwards the lessee of Wellow rectory died in suspicious circumstances. His widow was convinced that Crouch, learning that her husband was being treated for a leg disease, had bribed a Bath doctor to poison his medicine. The doctor left town on a fast horse, but it seems that nothing could be proved.[79]

Crouch's arrival in Englishcombe coincided with the renovation of St John's Hospital, Bath. This was so dilapidated that in 1527, the Bishop of Bath and Wells amalgamated it with Bath Priory. Prior Holloway then rebuilt the hospital and its properties. Crouch saw an opportunity; he had a clerical kinsman, John Simons. With subtlety and guile he persuaded the prior to appoint Simons as Master of St John's in 1532.[80] Crouch then became steward of the hospital.[81]

But this was not enough for him. He also wanted the reversion of the hospital, which he claimed the prior had promised him, and he resorted to the law. Tempers became frayed. When on 2 June 1533 a servant of Crouch's attempted to serve Prior Holloway with a subpoena in Bath Cathedral, he was frogmarched out by two of the priory servants, Thomas Horner and Thomas Batten. On 10 June Horner and an armed band waylaid Crouch and put him in the stocks. After three days of imprisonment, Crouch was brought to sign a £200 bond for his good behaviour. Crouch retaliated in August, imprisoning Horner in his house at Englishcombe. A mass of priory servants and tenants then besieged the house and attacked the doors with hatchets. Crouch tried to hold them off with arrows, but released Horner when the mob threatened to burn the house down.

It became clear at the trial that years of friction lay behind this explosion of local feeling. Crouch was habitually abusive and threatening. Two mayors of Bath, both clothmakers and major employers, had been so oppressed by him that they left for other cities, to the great impoverishment of Bath. A third former mayor testified to the difficulty of keeping the peace, with Crouch coming to Bath night and day with a band of armed rowdies and causing constant quarrels and affrays.[82] It is all too credible. Crouch seemed to provoke trouble. He purchased a lease from Bath Priory of the parsonage of Castle Cary and then declined to pay the rent. When the prior evicted him in February 1534, once again Crouch took the matter to court.[83]

National events were shortly to touch Englishcombe. Henry VIII had become unhappy with his queen, Ann Boleyn, and interested in Jane Seymour. Those who disliked Ann were ready with charges that she had committed adultery with, among others, the chief gentleman of the privy chamber, Henry Norris. This was the same Henry who had taken a lease of Englishcombe.[84] Henry and Ann were executed in May 1536, along with her four other alleged lovers. Henry VIII's marriage to Jane Seymour followed hard upon the executions and brought her family to national prominence. Her brother Edward was created Earl of Hertford. William Crouch was acting as steward for the Earl of Hertford's manor of Monkton Farleigh by the autumn of 1538.[85]

Crouch was also the Crown escheator for Somerset and Dorset in 1538-9.[86] This appointment cannot have been popular locally, which may explain a 'clamour in the country against Crouch'. There were shrewd attempts to bias the king. John Pereman, a painter of Englishcombe, reported

overhearing treason; Crouch had remarked cynically that a man with money enough might buy and sell the crown of England.[87] But Crouch's old enemy, Prior Holloway, was a spent force after the surrender of Bath Priory to the Crown in January 1539,[88] while Hertford remained friendly. In 1541 Hertford purchased a house and land on behalf of Crouch at Baggridge in Wellow.[89] By the following year Crouch was Hertford's rent collector in Somerset.[90]

Then the blow fell. In September 1543 Henry VIII granted Englishcombe, Laverton, Widcombe (near Harptree) and West Harptree to John lord Russell, Keeper of the Privy Seal.[91] Crouch was soon engaged in a fierce dispute with Russell over a lease of Laverton. Crouch's 21-year lease was due to expire in July 1546 and a new lease to follow on from it had been granted to John Richbell, one of the king's footmen.[92] Crouch bought it from Richbell, evidently without official sanction. He was committed to the Fleet Prison in April 1544 and remained there until he was prepared in June the following year to admit humbly that he had no title to the property.[93]

On the accession of the young Edward VI in 1547, his uncle, the Earl of Hertford, was created Duke of Somerset and governed in his name. Probably it was not difficult for Crouch, still in the new duke's service, to become MP for Leominster. Even after the execution of Somerset in 1552, Crouch was MP for Bath (1554) and Melcombe Regis (1555), but he was out of sympathy with Queen Mary's government. Early in 1556 he was again committed to the Fleet and then ordered 'to stand in the pillory with a paper on his head for slandering the Queen's Council'. He had implied that money could buy the loyalty of Privy Councillors. It was a characteristic note on which to end his public career. His later life was one long history of lawsuits over property, but he seemed to thrive on it. He died at a ripe age on 2 April 1586 at his house at Baggridge.[94]