

ANCESTRAL STORIES  
AND  
TRADITIONS OF GREAT FAMILIES

*Illustrative of English History.*

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## THE HUNGERFORD FAMILY.

**B**LOTS on the escutcheon is an old phrase used to denote the black spots of disgrace which appear in the records of many opulent families; but in few so darkly as that of the Hungerfords of Farleigh Castle, in Somersetshire, about nine miles west from Bath. There are other branches of the Hungerfords in Wiltshire; and their history is so complicated as to baffle collectors, who are ever on the lookout for additions to their stores, notwithstanding that accomplished antiquary, Sir Richard Colt Hoare, printed in 1823 a small octavo volume of this remarkable family, entitled *Hungerfordiana*. From these accumulations of evidence we may glean a narrative which not only portrays individuals, but affords us pictures of periods which are interesting as well as suggestive. The name of the Hungerfords has been preserved in our metropolis for several centuries; and that upon a spot which was long noted as a site of unfortunate speculation.

The Farleigh Castle estate is of high antiquity. For a long period it was held by Saxon thanes; and in the eleventh century it fell into the possession of Roger de

Curcelle, a Norman baron, who stood in high favour with William the Conqueror. After his death, the property reverted to the Crown, when William Rufus granted it, with other lands, to Hugh de Montfort; whence in old records we often find it denominated Farley Montfort. A strange character was this same Hugh. In opposition to the almost universal custom of the time, he chose to wear a long beard, whence he acquired the cognomen of *the bearded Hugh cum barbâ*. He was a right valiant soldier, but got killed in a duel with Walkeline de Ferrers, of Oakham Castle. The estate, however, remained in his family till the year 1335, when Sir Henry de Montfort granted this and other lands to Bartholomew Lord Burghersh, who figures in the unfortunate wars carried on by Richard II. against the Scots. His son and successor held the property but a short time, being compelled by his imprudence to part with it to Thomas Lord Hungerford. With his descendants it then continued for many generations, except only for a brief interval, when, its possessor having been beheaded, it was confiscated to the Crown and given to the Duke of Gloucester. Upon the Duke's accession to the throne it was granted by him to John Howard, Duke of Norfolk—'Jockey of Norfolk'—one of the staunchest of his adherents on Bosworth Field, where he fell in a personal encounter with the Earl of Oxford. After shivering their spears on each other's shields or breastplates, they fell to with their swords. Oxford, wounded in the arm by a blow which glanced from his crest, returned it by one which hewed off the vizor of

Norfolk's helmet, leaving the face bare ; and then, disdain-  
ing to follow up the advantage, drew back, when an arrow  
from an unknown hand pierced the Duke's brain. We must  
spare room for the close of this striking episode of Bos-  
worth. Surrey, hurrying up to assist or avenge his father,  
was surrounded and overpowered by Sir Gilbert Talbot and  
Sir John Savage, who commanded on the right and left for  
Richmond.

‘ Young Howard single with an army fights ;  
When, moved with pity, two renowned knights,  
Strong Clarendon and valiant Conyers, try  
To rescue him, in which attempt they die.  
Now Surrey, fainting, scarce his sword can hold,  
Which made a common soldier grow so bold,  
To lay rude hands upon that noble flower ;  
Which he disdain—anger gives him power—  
Erects his weapon with a nimble round,  
And sends the peasant's arm to kiss the ground.’<sup>1</sup>

If we may credit tradition or the chroniclers, all this was  
literally true. When completely exhausted, Surrey pre-  
sented the hilt of his sword to Talbot, whom he requested  
to take his life, and save him from dying by an ignoble  
hand. He lived to be the Surrey of Flodden Field, and the  
worthy transmitter of ‘ all the blood of all the Howards.’

To return to the Hungerfords. The fact of a lady of  
this name having suffered execution at Tybourn on the  
20th of February 1523, has been handed down by the  
Chronicle of Stow ; and it is stated by that historian that

<sup>1</sup> *Bosworth Field*, by Sir John Beaumont, Bart., in *Weaver's Funeral Monuments*, p. 554.

she died for murdering her husband. Stow cites in his margin the Register of the Grey Friars, meaning a volume now preserved in the British Museum, and including a London Chronicle which was printed for the Camden Society in the year 1852. We find that the body of the convicted lady was buried in the Church of the Grey Friars, in the middle of the nave; and that circumstance evidently occasioned the notice taken of the execution in the chronicle. In a side-note, written by a later but old hand, is, 'Suspendit apud Tyborne.' The passage is as follows: 'And this yere in feverette the xx<sup>ti</sup> day was the lady Alys Hungerford lede from the Tower unto Holborne, and there put into a carte at the churchyard with one of her servanttes, and so caryed unto Tiborne, and there both hongyd, and she burryed at the Grayfreeres in the nether end of the myddes of the church on the North syde.'

Sir Richard Colt Hoare, in his *Hungerfordiana*, already mentioned, connects this tragic event with that branch of the Hungerfords which resided at Cadenham, in Wiltshire; but the Rev. Mr. Jackson, F.S.A., who has formed large collections relative to the Hungerfords, corrects the statement of Sir Richard Colt Hoare, and adds: 'There were no knights in the Cadenham branch of the Hungerfords before a Sir George, who died in the year 1712; and the only knights of the family living at the date of the execution in 1523 were Sir Walter Hungerford of Farley Castle and Heytesbury, and Sir John Hungerford and Sir Anthony his son, both of Down

Ampney, whose wives had other names, and are otherwise accounted for.'

No other Alice Lady Hungerford identifiable with the culprit could be discovered but the second of the three wives of Sir Walter, who was summoned to Parliament as Lord Hungerford of Heytesbury in 1536; and considering that the extreme cruelty of that person to all his wives is recorded in a letter written by the third and last of them, and that his career was eventually terminated with the utmost disgrace in 1540, when he was beheaded (suffering at the same time as the fallen minister Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex), it was deemed not improbable that the unfortunate lady might have been condemned for some desperate attempt upon the life of so bad a husband, which had not actually effected its object, or even that her life and character had been sacrificed to a false and murderous accusation. In the survey of his lands he is described as Sir Walter Hungerford, Knight, late Lord Hungerford, 'of *hyge treason* attaynted' (Hoare's *Modern Wiltshire*). It is also stated that part of his offence was maintaining a chaplain named William Bird, who had called the king a heretic, and that he had procured certain persons by conjuration to know how long the king should live (Dugdale's *Baronage*, ii. p. 242). Holinshed states that 'at the hour of his death he seemed unquiet, as manie judged him rather in a frenzie than otherwise.'

In the above state the mystery remained until the discovery, a few years since, of an 'Inventory of the goods

belonging to the king's grace by the forfeiture of the Lady Hungerford, attainted of murder in Hilary term, anno xiiij. Regis Henrici VIII.;' where, although the particulars of the tragedy remain still undeveloped, we find that the culprit must have been a different person from the lady already noticed; and the murdered man, if her husband, of course not the Lord Walter.

It is ascertained by the inventory before us, that the Lady Hungerford who was hung at Tybourn on the 23d of February 1523, was really a widow, and that she was certainly convicted of felony and murder; moreover, that her name was Agnes, not Alice, as stated in the Grey Friars Chronicle. This inventory further shows, by the mention it contains of Heytesbury, Farleigh Castle, and other places, as well as by the great amount of personal property described, that the parties were no other than the heads of the Hungerford family. The initials E. and A. placed upon some of the articles point to the names of Edward and Agnes. In short, it is made evident that the lady was the widow of Sir Edward Hungerford, the father of Walter Lord Hungerford already mentioned; and we are led to infer that it was Sir Edward himself who had been poisoned or otherwise murdered by her agency.

It is a remarkable feature of the inventory, that many items of it are described in the first person, and consequently from the lady's own dictation; and towards the end of it is a list of 'the rayment of my husband's, which is in the keping of my son-in-law.' By this expression is

understood that the person so designated was Sir Walter Hungerford, Sir Edward's son and heir.

From this conclusion it follows that the lady was not Sir Walter's mother, who appears in the pedigree as Jane, daughter of John Lord Zouch of Horryngworth, but a second wife, whose name has not been recorded by the genealogists of the family.

To this circumstance must be attributed much of the difficulty that has hitherto enveloped this investigation. The lady's origin and maiden name are still unknown; but the Rev. Mr. Jackson has favoured Mr. J. G. Nichols with some particulars which clearly identify her as the widow of Sir Edward Hungerford. His observations are as follow :

‘That Agnes Lady Hungerford was the second wife of Sir Edward Hungerford of Heytesbury, may now be safely declared upon the evidence following. Of this Sir Edward very little is known. But it is quite certain that he was twice married, and that his first wife was a Zouch. The pedigrees uniformly call her Jane; and the arms of Hungerford impaling Zouch were found some years ago on stained glass in a cottage near Farleigh Castle, and were transferred to the church of that parish. By this first wife Sir Edward had only one son, Walter, afterwards created Lord Hungerford of Heytesbury. The date of the first wife's death is not known. The name of the second wife is found in Sir Edward's last will. He resided chiefly at Heytesbury; and from the circumstance of the eleven witnesses' names all belonging to that immediate neigh-



bourhood, it is most likely that he died there. After bequeathing small legacies to various churches and friends, the will concludes thus: "The residue of all my goodes, debts, catalls, juells, plate, harnesse, and all other moveable, whatsoever they be, I freely give and bequeth to *Agnes Hungerforde, my wife*. And I make, ordeyn, and constitute, of this my present last wille and testament, the said Agnes, my wife, and sole executrice." Sir Edward must have died soon afterwards, as the will was proved on the 29th of January 1521-2.

'After an interval of twelve months comes the fact, supplied by the heading of the present inventory, that "Lady Agnes Hungerford, *wydowe*, was attaynted of felony and murder in Hillary Term xiiij. Henry VIII.," *i. e.* between January 11 and January 31, A.D. 1523. And on the 20th February following (as the Grey Friars Register and Chronicle state), Lady Hungerford, whom those documents call *Alice*, was executed at Tybourn. Five months after, Walter Hungerford, only son and heir of Edward Hungerford, Knight, obtained the royal licence to enter upon all lands and tenements of which the said Sir Edward was seised in fee, or which *Agnes*, late wife of Sir Edward, held for term of her life.

'The inventory agrees with the will in another point. By the will, all goods, debts, chattels, jewels, plate, harness (*i. e.* armour), and all other moveables whatsoever, were "freely given" to Agnes the wife. These are precisely the articles specified in the inventory; and that they were the

absolute property of the widow is clear, from their being forfeited to the Crown, which would not have been the case had they been hers only for life.

‘ But though this inventory assists materially in clearing up three points in this transaction—viz., 1<sup>st</sup>, the lady’s Christian name ; 2<sup>d</sup>, whose wife she had been ; and 3<sup>d</sup>, that her crime was “felony and murder”—the rest of the story remains as much as ever wrapped in mystery. It is not yet certain who was the person murdered ; and of the motive, place, time, and all other particulars, we are wholly ignorant. John Stow, the chronicler, who repeats what he found in the Grey Friars Chronicle, certainly adds to that account the words, “for murdering her *husband*.” But as Stow was not born until two years after Lady Hungerford’s execution, and did not compile his own chronicle until forty years after it, and as we do not know whether he was speaking only from hearsay or on authority, the fact that it *was* the husband still remains to be proved.

‘ Excepting on the supposition that the Lady Agnes was a perfect monster among women, it is almost inconceivable that she should have murdered a husband who, only a few weeks or days before his death, in the presence of eleven clergymen and gentlemen known to them both, signed a document by which he made to her (besides the jointure from lands above alluded to) a free and absolute gift of all the personal property, including the accumulated valuables of an ancient family ; and this to the entire exclusion of his only son and heir ! When the character of that son

and heir, notoriously cruel to his own wives, and subsequently sent to the scaffold for an ignominious offence, is considered, and when it is further recollected that he was not the son, but only step-son of this lady, certain suspicions arise which more than ever excite one's curiosity to raise still higher the curtain that hides this tragedy. We have also yet to learn of what family this lady was; for so far we have only just succeeded in obtaining accurately her Christian name. It is to be hoped that the particulars of the trial may hereafter come to light among the public records.'

The Inventory describes an extraordinary accumulation of valuable property, and is therefore proportionally curious in illustration of the manners and habits of the times. It commences with a list of plate and jewels. Much of the former was adorned with the Hungerford arms, and with the knot of three sickles interlaced, which was used as the family badge or cognizance. A spoon was inscribed with the motto, '*Myn assuryd truth;*' which same motto, under the form '*Myne trowth assured,*' occurs also on the beautiful seal of Margaret Lady of Hungerford and of Bottreaux, who died in 1476.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The ancient badge of the Hungerfords was a single sickle, or handled gules (*Collectanea Topograph. et Geneal.* iii. 71). The sepulchral brass in Salisbury Cathedral of Walter Lord Hungerford (*ob.* 1449) and his wife, and another supposed to be that of his grandson Robert Hungerford (*ob.* 1463), were both *semé* of sickles (see their despoiled slabs or matrices engraved in Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments*, vol. ii. plate lvii.). The Hungerford knot was formed by entwining

Among the plate we notice 'forks with spones, to ete grene gynger with all,' the usual destination of the forks mentioned in English inventories. Thus, in an inventory of plate belonging to Edward III. and Richard II., we find these forks set with sapphires, pearls, etc. The forks are mentioned also as spoons: they may have either had prongs at one end and a bowl at the other, or have been made like the folding spoons of a more recent period, where a bowl fits over the prongs of the fork.

The vestments and ornaments of the chapel are next described; and then the furniture of the hall, parlour, an adjoining chamber, the nursery, the queen's chamber, the middle chamber, the great chamber, the chapel chamber, the lily chamber, the knighton chamber, the wardrobe chamber, the gallery, the chamber within the gallery, the women's chamber, the cellar, the buttery, the kitchen, the

three sickles in a circle. Three sickles and as many garbs, elegantly disposed within the garter, formed one of the principal bosses of the cloisters to St. Stephen's Chapel, Westminster. The standard of Sir John Hungerford of Down Ampney (temp. Hen. VIII.) was as follows: Red and green in the first compartment out of a coronet, or a garb of the same (charged with a mullet), between two sickles, crest argent, handled gules, banded or; and in the same compartment three similar sickles, each charged on the blade with a mullet; in the second compartment, three sickles interlaced around a mullet; in the third, three like knots of sickles between two single sickles charged as before. The Hungerford crest was a garb between two sickles, all within a coronet: the garb is supposed to have come from the family of Peveril, one of whose co-heirs married Walter Lord Hungerford, K.G., who died 1449. By that alliance the silver sickle met the golden wheatsheaf.

storehouse, and the brewhouse. In the parlour furniture we notice 'a joined cubeboard'—a joined cupboard. It must be remembered that cupboards were not, as they are now, closets set even into the walls, but literally a board or table on which plate was set out, more like the modern side-board. A considerable list of cupboard clothes may be found in the inventory of the wardrobe stuffs of Catharine of Aragon.

Then follows a list of the agricultural stock 'belonging to the Grange Place,' and the particulars of some parcels of armour 'left in the Castle of Farley,' including brigandine, formed of small plates of metal quilted with linen or other tissue. Among the curious items is boyde money, or bent money. In the will of Sir Edward Howard, Knight, Admiral of England, 1512, occurs: 'I bequeath him [Charles Brandon] my rope of bowed nobles that I hang my great whistle by, containing ccc. angels.' Money was often bent or bowed when intended to serve as love tokens, a custom perpetuated to the days of Butler :

' Like commendation ninepence bent,  
With "from and to my love" he went.'

In the present instance it appears to have been bowed for offerings to saints.

A long and curious catalogue of the lady's own dress and personal ornaments is next given, with a list of some obligations or bonds for money, some items of household stuff remaining in her husband's house at Charing Cross (where the Hungerford name still lingers); and lastly, the raiment

of her husband, which was in the keeping of her son-in-law.

The particular dwelling-house at which the principal part of the goods and furniture here described lay, is not positively mentioned by name ; but as, from the expression above quoted regarding the arms and armour, it would seem not to have been Farleigh Castle, there is every probability that the document chiefly relates to the manor-house of Heytesbury, where Sir Edward Hungerford died. The manor is thus described in a survey made upon the attainder of Walter Lord Hungerford in 31 Henry VIII. : 'The sayde lordship standeth very pleasauntly, in a very swete ayer, and there ys begon to be buylded a fayre place, whiche, if it had bene fynyshed, had bene able to have receyved the kynges highnes ; a fayre hall, with a goodly new wyndow mad in the same ; a new parlor, large and fayre ; iiij. fayre chambers, wherof one is gyhted, very pleasant ; a goodlie gallerie, well made, very long ; new kitchen ; new larder ; and all other houses of office belonging unto the same ; moted round aboute ; whereunto doth adjoyne a goodly fayre orchard, with very pleasaunte walkes in the same' (Sir R. C. Hoare's *Modern Wiltshire*).

This account seems to describe a house that had been erected by Walter Lord Hungerford within the space of the last five years. However, it is certain that his father Sir Edward had also resided at Heytesbury, and the present document shows that in his time the manor-place was already out of 'good receipt' and ample furniture.

The reader will not be surprised at further scandal being attached to the family of the Hungerfords, instances of whose degradation we have just recorded. Hence has arisen the popular story of the device of a toad having been introduced into their armorial bearings; but we are assured that this report is in every way nonsensical. 'Argent, three toads sable,' says the Rev. Mr. Jackson, 'is certainly one of their old quarterings, as may be seen upon one of the monuments in the chapel at Farley Castle. But it was borne by the Hungerfords for a very different reason. Robert the second Lord, who died in 1459, had married the wealthy heiress of the Cornish family of *Bottreaux*; and this was one of the shields used by *her* family, being in fact nothing more than an allusion, not uncommon in heraldry, to the name. This was spelled variously, *Bottreaux* or *Botterelles*; and the device was probably assumed from the similarity of the old French word *Botterel*, a toad (see Cotgrave), or the old Latin word *Botterella*,—the marriage with the *Bottreaux* heiress, and the assumption of the arms, having taken place *many years before* any member of the Hungerford family was attainted or executed (as some of them afterwards were), so that the toad story, which is in Defoe's *Tour*, falls to the ground.'

The town house of the Hungerfords, and which we have already mentioned, was one of the stately mansions which formerly embellished the north bank of the Thames, and stood between York House, and Suffolk, now Northumberland House. The estate had now devolved to Sir Edward

Hungerford, who was principally noted as a spendthrift. He sat in Parliament many years, sold in the same time twenty-eight manors, and ran through a fortune of thirty thousand pounds per annum. Malcolm is therefore correct in his conjecture as to Sir Edward's waning fortunes inducing him to convert his house and gardens into a public market. One of his extravagant freaks was to give five hundred pounds for a wig which he first wore at the coronation of Charles II. Malcolm tells us that, 'influenced by the same motives that prompted his illustrious eastern neighbours, he determined to sacrifice the honours of his ancestors at the shrine of Plutus, and obtained an Act of Parliament in the reign of Charles II. to make leases of the site of his mansion and grounds, where a market was soon afterwards erected.' This privilege was granted in 1679; the market rights were fully established in 1685, when they were granted to Sir Stephen Fox and Sir Christopher Wren, who became proprietors of the market estate. The vain-glory of the Hungerfords was not, however, forgotten in the market-house; for in a niche on the north side was placed a bust of Sir Edward Hungerford in the 500-guinea wig. Beneath was this inscription:

'Forum utilitatæ publicæ per quam necessariam,  
Regis Caroli secundi inuente Majestatæ propriis  
Sumptibus erexit, per fecitque D. Edvardus  
Hungerford, Balnei Miles, Anno MDCLXXXII.'

Sir Edward did not, however, retrieve his fallen fortunes: he is said to have lived for the last thirty years of his life on



charity, and died at the advanced age of 115! By him Farleigh was sold in 1686 to the Bayntons, and it next came into the possession of the Houltons, in which family it still remains. They did not, however, take up their abode in the old castle of the Hungerfords, but at a house in a different part of the parish, adding a park and picturesque grounds.

The next record of the Hungerford family shows a member of it in a more favourable light than his predecessors, but strikingly illustrates the transitoriness of human existence. The spendthrift Sir Edward had an only son, Edward, to whom is dedicated the volume entitled *Humane Prudence*, consisting of quaint maxims and sentences, edited by 'W. de Britaine.' Edward Hungerford was not only heir to a noble fortune, but by a very early marriage, at the age of nineteen, with Lady Alathæa Compton, became entitled, had they both lived, to still larger possessions. 'You have,' says the dedication, 'made a fair progress in your studies *beyond your years.*' 'The *nobleness of your stock* is a spur to virtue.' 'As much as you excel others *in fortune,*' etc. Such phraseology could only be addressed to some young man of good family and great prospects. But Sir Edward's son died in September 1681, aged twenty, and the *Humane Prudence* did not appear till 1682, which renders it doubtful whether Sir Edward's son was the person to whom the book was dedicated.

Here our glances at the chequered fortunes of the Hungerfords must end. Aubrey has this quaint regret for this

family decadence. In his *Miscellanies* he points to the place for its 'local fatality,' telling us : 'The honourable family of the Hungerfords is probably of as great antiquity as any in the county of Wilts. Hungerford (the place of the barony) was sold but lately by Sir Edward Hungerford, Knight of the Bath, as also the noble and ancient seat of Farleigh Castle. But that this estate should so long continue is not very strange ; for it being so vast, 'twas able to make several withstandings against the shock of fortune.'

John Britton, in his *Autobiography*, tells us the Hungerford family possessed numerous estates, manors, and mansions, in the counties of Wilts, Berks, Somerset, Gloucester, etc. 'Though, at the zenith of its prosperity, the Hungerford genealogical tree spread its branches over a wide tract of territory, it had dwindled almost to nothing in my boyish days, and was said to have had one of its last distant female representatives in Chippenham, near the end of the last century.' Mr. Jackson, in the *Wiltshire Magazine*, describes two chapels founded by the Hungerfords in the cathedral of Salisbury ; a redeeming record wherewith to close our *Hungerfordiana*.