

ULCOMBE, IRELAND AND THE ST. LEGERS

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THE family of St. Leger, seated at Ulcombe since the Conquest, produced in the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries a number of administrators and soldiers who played notable parts in Anglo-Irish history. Of these the most distinguished by far was Sir Anthony St. Leger, K.G. (? 1496–1559), who is commemorated as follows on a mural tablet in the north chapel of Ulcombe church:

SIR ANTHONY SENTLIGER KNIGHT OF THE MOST HONORABLE ORDER OF THE GARTER, GENTLEMAN OF THE PRIVIE CHAMBER AND EMPLOYD IN MOST HONORABLE OFFICES VNDER THE MOST RENOWNED HENRY THE EIGHT AND EDWARD THE SIXT KINGS, TWICE LORD DEPVTY OF IRELAND BY WHOSE MEANES IN HIS FIRST GOVERNMENT THE NOBILITIE AND COMMONS THERE WERE INDVOED BY GENERALL AND FREE CONSENT TO GEVE VNTO HENRIE THE EIGHT KING OF ENGLAND IN THAT PROVINCE ALLSO REGALIA IVRA THE TITLE AND SCEPTER OF KINGE TO HIM AND HIS POSTERITIE FOR EVER WHOSE PRAEDCESSORS BEFORE WERE ENTITVLED ONLY LORDES OF IRELAND THIS GRAVE COVNCELLOVR AFTER THIS COVRSE OF LIFE SPENT IN THE SERVICE OF THIES TWO RARE AND REDOVBTED KINGES HAVING ENDVRED NEVERTHELESS SOME CROSSES IN THE TYME OF QVEENE MARY AND YET LIVING TO SEE THE FOELICIOVS RAIGNE OF OVR PRESENT PEERLESS QVEENE ELIZABETH DEPARTED ANNO SALVTIS 1559 AGED ABOUT 63 YEARES

Before proceeding to Irish affairs, it will be best to outline briefly the earlier history of the St. Legers, and to note in passing some of their monuments. 'According to tradition', Sir Robert St. Leger supported the hand of the Conqueror when he stepped ashore in England; he later took up his abode at Ulcombe. Radulph St. Leger fought under Richard I at Acre; three brothers St. Leger were knighted by Edward I for chivalry at Caerlaverock (1300). Of these Sir Ralph had received under Henry III the grant of a weekly market at Ulcombe and of a fair to be held on November 1st and the two days following.¹ Another Ralph was summoned to Parliament in 1344, and his son Sir Arnold in 1376. The latter's younger brother Thomas St. Leger is commemorated by a fine brass (1408) in Otterden church.

¹ R. Furley, *History of the Weald of Kent*, vol. II (i) (1874), 54.

Presumably, Geoffrey St. Leger, Bishop of Ossory, under whom Kilkenny Cathedral was completed in the years after 1260, was a member of the family. If so, this was an early and isolated connection with Ireland.

John St. Leger, Sheriff of Kent in 1431, married Margery, daughter of James Donnett, of Rainham. The memorial of this James Donnett is a brass inscription (1409) in Rainham church;² that of John is the brass of a man in armour of the Lancastrian period which is mounted on a board in the north aisle of Ulcombe church.² (The inscription is missing.) John St. Leger died in 1442, leaving four sons. The eldest, Ralph, was appointed by Edward IV Constable of Leeds Castle in 1470, and died in the same year. His brass is a singularly fine one, and the best of the monuments at Ulcombe. He is shown in armour of the utmost weight and elaboration, his head resting on a helmet bearing the crest of the St. Legers, a griffin *passant or*. (Their arms, Azure fretty argent, a chief or, may be seen in medieval glass in the east window of the north chapel at Ulcombe and in one of the nave windows at Nettlestead.) His wife Anne (*née* Prophete) is depicted in butterfly head-dress and a very low-cut gown. The inscription reads:

*Orate pro aiabus Radulphi Sentleger Armigeri et Anne uxoris sue qui
quidē Radulphus obiit
undecimo die mensis Novembris Anno Dñi Millio CCCClxx^o. Quor
animabus ppiciet' de' Amen.**

Anne married as her second husband John Elmbrigge and reappears on their brass at Merstham, Surrey (1473).² Her third husband was Sir William Peche, but his brass at Lullingstone (1487) shows her not although she survived him.

Ralph's brother Sir Thomas reached the peak of social eminence in marrying Anne, sister of King Edward IV, but having participated with other Kentish notabilities—especially the Woodvilles of the Mote—in Buckingham's unsuccessful rising against Richard III, he was executed in 1483. His daughter Anne married Sir George Manners and was ancestress of the Dukes of Rutland.

* Translation of inscription to Ralph St. Leger, 1470.

Orate pro a(n)(m)abus Radulphi Sentleger Armigeri et Anne uxoris sue qui
quide(m) Radulphus obiit
Undecimo die mensis Novembris Anno D(omi)ni Mill(es)i(m)o CCCClxx^o Quor(um)
Animabus p(ro)piciet(ur) de(us) Amen.
Pray for the souls of Ralph St. Leger Esquire and Anne his wife
which said Ralph died
Eleventh day of month of November A.D. 1470 whose
souls may God pardon Amen.

² R. Griffin and Mill Stephenson, *List of Monumental Brasses remaining in the County of Kent* (1922).

James, the fourth brother, married Ann, daughter and heiress of Thomas Butler, 7th Earl of Ormonde. Her sister Margaret married Sir William Boleyn and was the grandmother of Anne Boleyn—another royal connection. Through his wife Sir James became possessed of Annery in Monkleigh in Devon,³ where he is commemorated by another brass (1509). His son Sir George was Sheriff of Devon tempo 22 Henry VIII, but the grandson Sir John sold Annery.

Ralph's heir was another Ralph, who married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir John Hawte, of Ightham Moat, and was Sheriff of Kent in 1503. Their eldest surviving son was Sir Anthony, the Lord Deputy of Ireland.

Sir Anthony St. Leger was born probably in 1496; at the age of twelve he was sent 'to get grammar learning' in Italy. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, he was agent of Cromwell 'in the demolition of suppressed abbeys'. (His own brother Arthur was Prior of Leeds 1528, acknowledged the royal supremacy in 1534 and, probably well knowing the way the wind was blowing, resigned in favour of Thomas Day, who surrendered the Priory in 1540. No-one can have been surprised when the site and buildings with 323 acres were demised by the Crown to Anthony in the same year. Arthur died as the non-resident Rector of Hollingbourne and was buried there on 22nd May, 1569.)⁴

St. Leger rose into high favour at Court, and in 1537 was placed at the head of a commission 'for the ordre and establishment to be taken and made touching the hole state of our lande of Ireland'. He arrived in Dublin on 8th September, 1537. After travelling extensively in the Pale, in Tipperary and elsewhere, he reported that Ireland was much easier to be won than to be retained, 'for onelesse it be peopled with others than be there alreedy and also certain fortresses there buylded and warded, if it be gotten the one daye it is loste the next' (State Papers Henry 8, ii 534, vide *D.N.B.*).

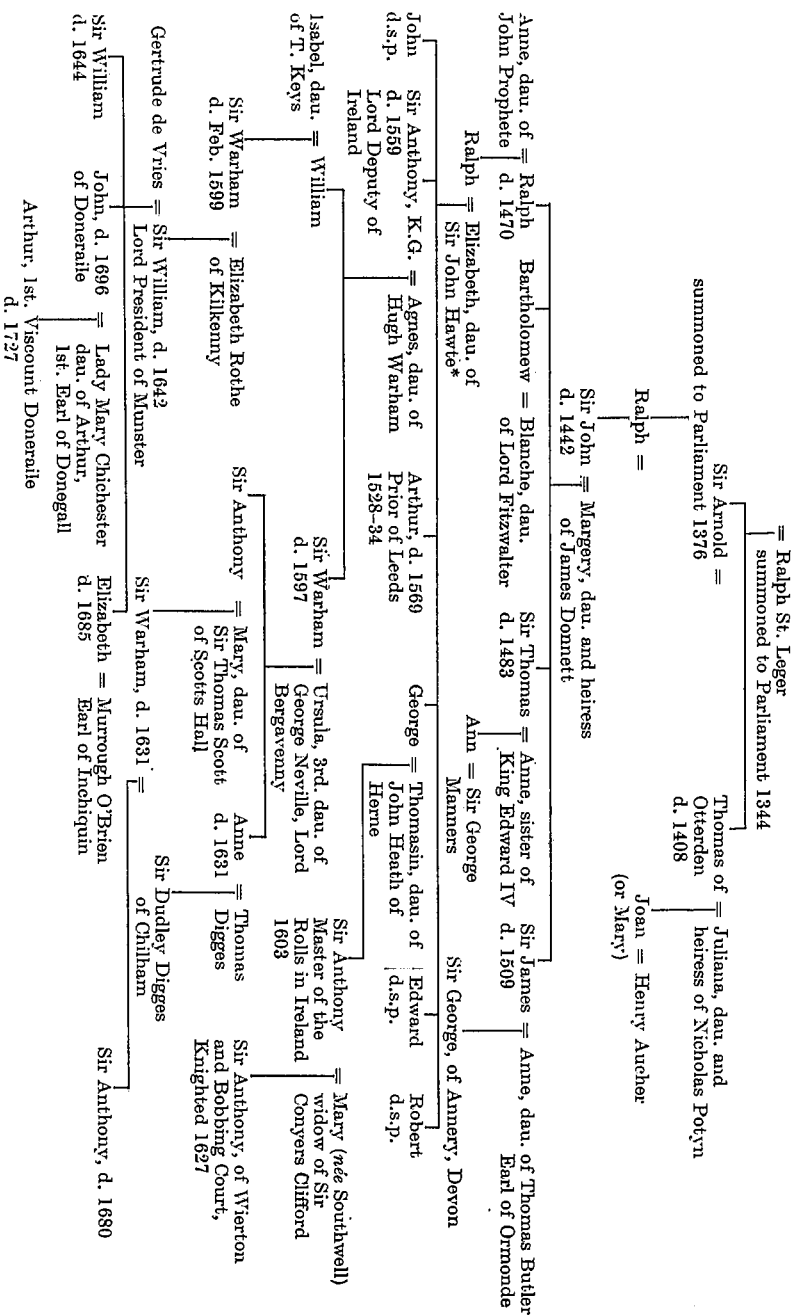
In 1539, Anthony was knighted, escorted Anne of Cleves on her journey to England to marry Henry VIII, and became Sheriff of Kent.

Since the discovery of the New World, the strategic importance of Ireland had increased, and with the establishment of a strong centralized government under the Tudors it was inevitable that an attempt would be made to bring the country under more effective English control. At first Henry VIII tried like his predecessors to rule through the great Anglo-Irish nobles, but in the 1530's, after troubles with the Fitzgeralds, Earls of Kildare, whose family had provided several viceroys, English Lords Deputy were appointed in the persons first of Skeffington and then of Lord Leonard Grey. The latter was recalled early in 1540 to face several charges, including one of conniving at the escape of an important Fitzgerald prisoner.

³ Risdon, *Survey of Devon* (1811 edition), 276.

⁴ J. Cave Brown, *The Story of Hollingbourne*, (1890), 50.

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* J. Philpot, Visitation of Kent 1619-21 gives Richard Haut. arm. 13 Ed. 1V Abbreviations: d. = died d.s.p. = died without issue

On 7th July, 1540, Sir Anthony St. Leger was appointed Lord Deputy at a salary of £666 13s. 4d. This may have been adequate; but the occupational hazards of the post were considerable, and St. Leger must have been 'encouraged' in Voltaire's sense of the word by the execution of his predecessor Grey in June 1541. In the summer of the same year the Irish parliament gave Henry the title of King of Ireland. A period of relative tranquillity followed. In 1544, Sir Anthony was made Knight of the Garter: recalled temporarily in 1546, he was superseded in 1548 by Sir Edward Bellingham. Meanwhile, he had been granted several manors and rectories in Kent, including those of Selling, Kennington and Lenham, these having formerly been possessions of St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury; he also received the lands of Kent's Chantry in Headcorn.

Reconstituted Lord Deputy under Edward VI on 4th August, 1550, Sir Anthony was charged with the establishment of protestantism in Ireland. In this task he appears to have been somewhat lukewarm; intrigues and charges of 'popery' caused him to leave Ireland again in May 1551, Sir James Croft being left in charge. The next year, however, he received a grant of Leeds Castle from the Crown. On the death of Edward VI, he supported the claims of Mary, and was by her re-appointed Lord Deputy in October 1553, this time with a responsibility for restoring the old religion. He was finally recalled in the spring of 1556. He had made some enemies, and at his death at Ulcombe in March 1559 charges against him of defalcation were still outstanding. These, no doubt, were some of the 'crosses' referred to on his monument.

Sir Anthony seems to have been a moderate man, relatively fair and unprejudiced, and to have had an understanding, rare at that time, of the good and bad points of the Irish character. Hasted remarks that 'he by his prudence and magnanimity did more towards civilizing that nation and alluring it into a submission to the English government than anyone had done since the Conquest of it to his time'. His changes of front in religious matters ought not perhaps to be judged too harshly. The times demanded wary walking, and his own position seems to have been a mediate one and hence unacceptable to extremists on either side. The career of his neighbour Nicholas Wotton of Boughton Malherbe may be cited in comparison—Dean of Canterbury under Henry VIII and Edward VI, conformed to the changes under Mary I, Dean again under Elizabeth until his death in 1567.

Dom David Knowles observes that in the early Tudor period the two most characteristic features of public life—its materialistic, cautious, realist outlook, and complete submission to the King—were present in varying degrees in all Englishmen of whatever rank or order.⁵

The monumental inscription, for which his son Sir Warham may be

⁵ D. Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, Vol. III (1959), 197–198.

assumed to have been responsible is worth another glance. Henry VIII and Edward VI are 'most renowned', 'rare and redoubtable', the reigning Elizabeth 'peerlesse'. Mary is tactfully left without epithet, although Sir Warham is believed to have taken up arms on her behalf in Wyatt's revolt. Sir Anthony, it is clear, endured 'some crosses' also under Edward VI which it might not have been opportune to mention at the time the monument was put up. Considering his eminence, the memorial is not a splendid one, and gives the impression that expense has been spared. Above the inscription are the St. Leger arms and crest; below is an hour-glass.

Sir Anthony married Agnes, daughter of Hugh Warham of Malshanger, Hants., and niece and heiress of Archbishop Warham. She died a few days after him in 1559. Their eldest son William appears to have been disinherited; the second son Sir Warham (? 1525-1597) was Sheriff of Kent in 1560 and, passing over into Ireland served as President of Munster in 1564-68. He and Ormonde, greatest of the pro-English nobility, could not agree, and Sir Warham returned to England in 1569. From 1570-72, the turbulent and tragic Earl of Desmond was in his custody at Leeds Castle. Sir Warham died at Cork in 1597, having sold Leeds Priory and other Kentish properties in 1573.

Another Sir Warham, son of the disinherited William, took part in Essex's ill-fated Irish Campaign, including the abortive conference with Tyrone. Out riding with an escort near Cork on 18th February, 1599/1600, he came on Hugh Maguire, Lord of Fermanagh, with a small party of horsemen. The two groups charged; St. Leger shot Maguire with a pistol, Maguire thrust a lance into St. Leger's skull; both died.⁶ Hasted confuses this second Sir Warham with the first, and the *Dictionary of National Biography* remarks on the difficulty of distinguishing between the several Sir Warhams.

The second Sir Warham, who married Elizabeth Rothe of Kilkenny, left a son, Sir William, later seated at Doneraile, Co. Cork. A tough soldier who had served in the Low Countries, he was appointed by Charles I in 1627 Lord President of Munster. He was MP for the City of Cork in 1639 and, under Strafford, Sergeant Major-General of the Irish forces. He played an active part in trying to quell the rebellion of 1641, but at the time of his death (on 2nd July, 1642) he had been forced back to the vicinity of Cork. According to Hasted he had alienated Ulcombe to Henry Clerke of Rochester. The *Dictionary of National Biography*, however, states that Sir Anthony, eldest son of the first Sir Warham, had succeeded to the Ulcombe estates, and Hasted himself says that Anthony St. Leger presented to the Rectory there in 1599. This Anthony left a son, a third Sir Warham, who was knighted in 1608,

⁶ 'C. Falls, *Elizabeth's Irish Wars* (1950), 257.

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accompanied Raleigh to Guiana, and died in 1631. He sold Leeds Castle to Sir Richard Smyth.

Sir William left two sons. The elder, Sir William, was killed fighting for the King at the second Battle of Newbury, in 1644; the younger, John, was father of the first Viscount Doneraile. A daughter, Elizabeth, married Murrough O'Brien, Earl of Inchiquin, the notorious 'Murrough of the Burnings', who succeeded his father-in-law as Lord President.

There is a mural monument in the south chapel of Ulcombe church to Sir Francis Clerke (*d.* 1685), son of the Henry referred to above.

The connection of the St. Legers with Ulcombe thus ended about the middle of the seventeenth century. Of their mansion perhaps the only surviving fragment is a fourteenth-century arch in the interior of Ulcombe Place.⁷ By a curious chance, the estate passed by the marriage of a Clerke heiress early in the nineteenth century to the family of the Marquess of Ormonde, descendants of the first Sir Warham's old adversary. The link between Ulcombe and Ireland was thus renewed.

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⁷ J. Newman, *The Buildings of Kent: West Kent and the Weald* (1969), 564.