

## A few facts and personal observations on Sir Ralph de Cromwell (1393-1456), Treasurer of England .

Sir Ralph is perhaps the most eminent individual to emerge from the village of Lambley. He is, unfortunately, sometimes confused with the notorious Oliver Cromwell 1599 to 1658 or Thomas Cromwell, but there is no connection.

Ralph is reported to have been born and lived as a young boy, in the Lambley Manor House, just to the south of Lambley Church, in the Pingle Field. At this time, the Cromwell Family seemed to be well known in the 'County Set' but not quite at the 'Top Table'. The family name of Cromwell was derived from an early association with the village of that name which is 14 miles to the North East of Lambley on the banks of the River Trent. This village and the family were originally called Crumwell but it was changed at some early point in history. The first born son of the family was always called Ralph and it was the seventh Ralph whose family lived in The Manor at this time and it was his son, the eighth Ralph ( 3<sup>rd</sup> Baron) who rose to the pinnacle of English politics.

This Ralph lived in the Manor during his early years but for some reason he was chosen to join The Court circles when still a boy. It is thought that he was required to be a companion to a young person at court, but it is not clear who was the young person and it may be confused with his role later in life. He was placed under the care of Thomas, Duke of Clarence, younger brother of reigning King Henry 5<sup>th</sup> ( why such a senior chaperone?). It must have been a considerable shock for the boy to move from the tiny village of Lambley into the lofty circles of The Court but he appeared to thrive and must have received intensive tuition in political and military ethics and procedures. At the age of 19 years he served under Thomas in various skirmishes over in France during the 100 year war and when he was 22, they both took part in the historic Battle of Agincourt in 1415, (so Lambley was represented!)

In this battle, the exhausted and bedraggled army and long bowmen, rained thousands of Arrows, until the sky was darkened, down onto the conventionally equipped French army when they were still too far away to retaliate. The French attempted to respond using the cavalry, both men and horses protected with burnished armour, but heavy mud and some inter- battalion rivalry thwarted their efforts. It was a very, bloody, affair! The French had in mind a little more hand-to-hand combat and cried "Foul!" demanding a red card but nevertheless, the English were victorious and the course of history was changed.

During these engagements with the French, Ralph proved to be a very brave and competent soldier and this, no doubt, did him no harm on his return to Court, since he was awarded his knighthood. It was around this time in 1419 that he inherited Tattershall Castle in Lincolnshire and his political life really began to change.

King Henry 5<sup>th</sup> was on the throne during the above period but following serious illness he died in 1422 and his infant son was crowned Henry 6<sup>th</sup> at the age of 9 months. It didn't take them long to realise that he would need some help and the Council of Regency was formed to advise and act on his behalf. Sir Ralph was appointed to The Council and to Parliament as Privy Councillor. He also became Chamberlain of the Household, a position he held until 1432. He married Margaret Deyncourt in 1424 but their marriage was childless and she passed away in 1454.

Sir Ralph continued to be involved in the high level politics of the country and in 1431, he was appointed as King's Chamberlain at the coronation in Paris of King Henry 6 who was only 10 years of age. In the same year he appears to have been directed to witness the execution of Joan of Arc who was 'burned at the stake' in Rouen. What a way to go!

Joan must have been a remarkable young woman; at the age of only 17 years and urged on by visions, she persuaded the French power house lead by Charles (later to become King Charles 7<sup>th</sup>), to allow her to lead the French Army against the English at Orleans. She defeated them! By this time she was a very mature 18 years old but events went against her and the reward from the English was ghastly death at the stake at an age of 19. She was given a sainthood from the French.

In 1433, Sir Ralph became Lord Treasurer of England and this appointment opened the door to many new opportunities. He was granted the rights to land in this Midlands region and began renovation and rebuilding work at South Wingfield Manor, Colliweston and Tattershall along with ownership of an estate at Wymondham in Norfolk. In 1436 he became Master of the King's Mews and Falcons. In 1439 he was given the King's permission to create the collegiate church at Tattershall dedicated to The Holy Trinity. He built the central brickwork Grand Tower which, today, is regarded as one of the finest example of early brickwork in the country.

During this period he was endowed with considerable power and wealth, but his responsibilities must have been enormous. Remember that during this period of history, the 100 year war with the French,(English attempts to reign over France) was ongoing and had to be financed from a hard strapped budget which resulted in a greatly increased crown debt. In this time at the Treasury, he created his personal badge of office which comprises a leather money bag with a clasp through which are entwined stems of the Gromwell plant - is the similarity to the family name a coincidence? This is a hairy plant, often regarded as a weed, which can bear small yellow, white or blue flowers and minute nuts. This badge adorns all the buildings associated with Sir Ralph, including Lambley Church and most fittingly, a similar design has been adopted as the logo by Lambley Historical Society.

Sir Ralph seemed to visit his properties on an irregular basis. During a recent tour of South Wingfield Manor, the guide led us to an upper floor window with good views down the hill. When a visit was expected, a lookout would be stationed at the window to give warning of the first sign of movement at which the huge 'welcome routine' would swing into action. Sir Ralph would probably be up front with his standard flying, leading a column of many soldiers and staff who would attend to his security, comfort, hygiene and culinary needs. He would present an impression of almost frightening power and authority as befitted his position in Parliament!

In 1443 Sir Ralph resigned as Treasurer, perhaps related to the rising influence of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, who became the most influential adviser to the King. In `1445 he was appointed Constable of Nottingham Castle and Warden of Sherwood Forest. In 1449, Sir Ralph became embroiled in a local dispute with William Tailboys, a Lincolnshire squire and a supporter of the Duke of Suffolk. In November of that year, Tailboys attacked him and eventually ended up in the Tower of London. Suffolk himself, fell from favour and was murdered during a crossing to France! The death of Suffolk unleashed a flood of jealousies which included a bitter dispute over land between Sir Ralph and the Duke of Exeter. These events and others, give the impression that he was not a man to be crossed. In 1450 he was reappointed Chamberlain of the Household.

Sir Ralph de Cromwell died on January 4, 1456 and most accounts state that this occurred at Colliweston but a least one Google item claims that his death was at South Wingfield; all agree that he was buried at Tattershall. Could it be that the wily old campaigner decided to slip quietly away from the political turmoil and spend his last few months with slippers and pipe in front of a log fire at the family home IN LAMBLEY??

Sir Ralph wrote two wills, the second included a codicil stipulating a £300 bequest to rebuild Lambley Church and an instruction to inter his Mother and Father within the Church. His heirs did not benefit greatly since much of the revenue from his land and estates went to charities.

Ralph was an incredible man whose achievements in military and political circles are difficult to believe. WE IN LAMBLEY SHOULD CELEBRATE OUR ASSOCIATION WITH HIM !!  
So what remains in the Village to remember the great man? There is, of course, The Holy and Undivided Trinity Church with all its rich history, Ralph's parents under the Sanctuary Aisle and his twin badges of office, the Pingle Field, and most recently, Cromwell Crescent. His pipe and slippers have yet to be unearthed!!  
Patrick Burrows.