The Cotton Family of Warblington Castle

After the execution of Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury in May 1541 (two and a half years after her arrest at Warblington Castle), the Manor of Warblington devolved upon the Crown, and was granted in 1552 to Sir Richard Cotton, Comptroller of the Household to King Edward VI. The young king visited Warblington in the course of his tour of the south coast. He was already showing signs of the illness that would kill him at the age of sixteen, and he undertook this tour in the vain hope that it would restore him to good health. He recorded in a letter:

> And being thus determined came to Guildford, from thence to Petworth, and so to Cowdrey a goodly house of Sir Anthony Browne's, where we were marvellously, yea rather excessively banqueted; from thence we went to Halvenaker (Halnaker) a pretty house besides Chichester, and from thence we went to Warblington, a fair house of Sir Richard Cotton. (....) In all these places we had both good hunting and good cheer.
> (Quoted from Charles John Longcroft, *Hundred of Bosmere*, p.97)

Richard Cotton seems to have been a favourite of Edward VI, but when the young king died in 1553, Cotton was one of those who wrote to Mary Tudor, asking clemency for Lady Jane Grey, and, like Margaret Pole before him, he was disgraced and was forced to retire to his house at Warblington, where he probably died.

The next owner of Warblington Castle was Richard Cotton's son George, a staunch adherent to the Roman Catholic faith, who, under the terms of Elizabeth I's Act of Settlement, paid fines for nonattendance at the services of the newly established Church of England for more than twenty years. The original fine imposed by the Act was 12d for non-attendance at the services of the

Parish Church on Sundays and Holy Days. In 1581 the fine was increased to £20 a month, calculated upon the lunar months, of which there are thirteen in a year, instead of the usual twelve calendar months. George Cotton's payments of £260 a year can be traced from 1587 to 1607. In addition, he paid off in instalments a sum of £1199.6s.8d in arrears for non-attendance at the parish church before 1587.

During this period, Warblington Castle was a shelter for many Catholic priests who landed on the Hampshire Coast. Among them was the Jesuit Robert Southwell, whose sister married Edward Bannister of Idsworth, and whose aunt was married to a member of the Shelley family of Buriton. George Cotton's wife was also a member of the Shelley family, and these Catholic families, interrelated not only by marriage but also by social position and contacts, formed a chain of "safe houses" from which incoming priests could be sent to London and elsewhere. Warblington Castle itself became known as "The Common Refuge".

Sheltering a priest was a risky business, even in large households where one or two extra "servants" might be expected to pass unnoticed. (At the time of her arrest in November 1538, Margaret Pole's household at Warblington Castle numbered seventy-two servants, and George Cotton would also have employed a large domestic staff.) The households of known Catholics were subject to searches, and to the attentions of government spies, one of whom reported in 1609:

> In the house of Mr Cotton of Hampshire there is
> harboured a Jesuit who names himself Thomas Singleton.
> He teaches the grandchildren of the said Cotton.

In 1586, Catholics were given hope that they might be able to buy religious toleration by paying an additional yearly sum to

the Queen. George Cotton promised to pay to the utmost of his power, which was

> .....but weak of itself, and hath been of late diminished as well by ordinary charges of children and
> servants necessarily depending on (him) as by manifold losses sustained partly by long imprisonment, partly by the evicting of a great part of (his) living.

At this time, three of George Cotton's daughters were married, but he had another seven children who were still "depending on him". George's younger brother Henry, on the other hand, was a Protestant and a godson of Queen Elizabeth. Like his brother George he had a very large family to support. Of his nineteen children, fourteen survived into adulthood, but, helped by his godmother, he became Anglican Bishop of Salisbury, and it was said that the weddings of his daughters were paid for out of diocesan funds, a move which made the bishop none too popular with his flock. The religious differences between the two brothers George and Henry Cotton illustrate the kind of split in family loyalties which was tragically all too common in that period of religious turmoil.

In spite of the huge drain on their finances by fines, the Cotton family remained at Warblington Castle. In 1612, the Manor of Warblington was in lease from Richard Cotton (son of George?) to yet another George Cotton, and in 1621, when a survey of the manor took place, he was still lord. At the time of the Civil War (1642 — 1648), the Richard Cotton of that generation was a supporter of the Royalist cause. Early in 1643, Colonel Norton of Southwick, the Parliamentary military leader, occupied Warblington House (Castle) with a garrison, rather loosely reported as being between forty and eighty men. In reply, the Royalist general, Lord Hopton, sent dragoons to Warblington, where Norton's garrison was "doing much damage to the country". Warblington House was defended by Norton's

men, but surrendered after a few days. A contemporary report says, "After a long siege and loss of more men than there were in garrison" Lord Hopton took Warblington Castle. Another writer says, "Lord Hopton has spent his time frivolously against Warbelton House, betwixt Winchester and Portsmouth, where we leave him till divine justice finds him".

Whether "frivolous" or not, the time occupied in Lord Hopton's attempts to retake Warblington Castle almost certainly resulted in the loss to the Royalists of Arundel Castle. Lord Hopton took up quarters at Stansted and Westbourne to plot the relief of both Warblington and Arundel, but Arundel had surrendered before one of Hopton's officers, Robert Legg, with 500 horse, and "each horse-man with a bagg of meal behind him to try to putt it into the Castle", could set out for West Sussex. The Parliamentarians had made sure of their success at Arundel by diverting the course of a pond, "the draining whereof emptied the Wels (sic) of water within the castle, so that now the Enemy began to be distressed with thirst".

Whatever the truth of the details of the siege, Warblington Castle was never again lived in by the Lords of the Manor of Warblington, and was slighted (partially destroyed) in 1644. Much of the stone of which the Castle was built was used to construct a house for the bailiff left to run the Warblington estate, and for the farmhouse. The present Warblington Castle House (built for the bailiff) is said to be positioned on the site of the "state rooms" of Margaret Pole's Castle, occupying the side of the courtyard immediately opposite the gatehouse (of which one tower remains). At the corner of the lane leading to Warblington Castle is a house constructed of stone, probably recovered from the Castle ruins. A peep into the farmyard also reveals a stone-walled building, which may have been part of the original castle building, or reconstructed in materials from the ruins. The rest of the castle stone was gradually carted away

by local people, and used to build walls and cottages in the area. Warblington Castle stone can still be seen in some of the old houses at the entrance to Southleigh Road.

It seems that Warblington Church was also damaged in the siege of the Castle; during the restorations of 1860, a stone taken out of the wall of the chancel turned out to be part of a broken monument, dating from the reign of Elizabeth I. It had been used to patch the wall.

In spite of the destruction of their manor house, the Cotton family did not lose contact with Warblington. In 1666, Richard Cotton of Warblington and Bedhampton married Elizabeth Lumley, daughter of the Honourable John Lumley of Stansted. When he died in 1695, he was buried in the chancel at Warblington, his heir being his son William, who lived at Watergate in Sussex. William Cotton, the last of the line, died unmarried in 1736, leaving the manors of Warblington and Emsworth to his nephew Thomas Panton.

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