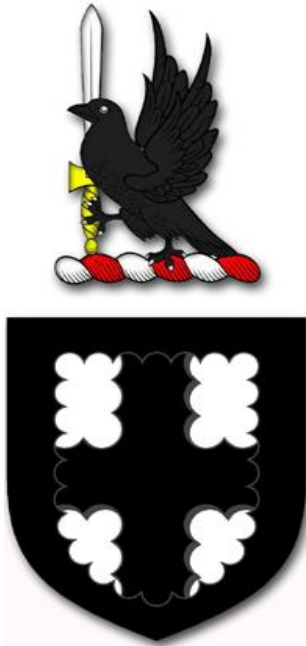


TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: THE HOLCROFTS OF VALE ROYAL



*The Holcroft family's coat of arms
(Courtesy of Martin Goldstraw)*

"When you the harrow come on high, soon a raven's nest will be". These words ascribed to the Cheshire prophet Robert Nixon are said to be a reference to the last abbot of Vale Royal Abbey, John Hareware, being ejected by Sir Thomas Holcroft who then took up residence among the ancient monastic buildings. The raven is an allusion to the Holcroft family crest which depicted a raven grasping a sword in one of its claws. Whilst Sir Thomas Holcroft is well known in Cheshire history as the man responsible for the surrender of Vale Royal Abbey and the 'plucking down' of its church during King Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries, there is much more to tell about this man and his son of the same name who both resided at Vale Royal. The first Thomas, originally from Lancashire, was a man of some importance and well known at the courts of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary. A person who from fairly humble origins managed to carve out for himself a career as an officer in the royal household, who was an energetic diplomat and as a courageous soldier; one of very few Lancashire gentlemen who made the transition from local service to national politics.¹ His life is an example of how a Tudor gentleman could, through having the right connections, some good fortune and ambition, achieve much and become a wealthy individual. The second Thomas was similarly a man of importance both in Cheshire and in London. He, like his father became a Member of Parliament, a servant of the crown, and a member of the Privy Council. He was closely allied to the influential Cecil family and a contemporary in Parliament of such national figures as Sir Francis Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Francis Bacon.

Sir Thomas Holcroft I (1505-1558)

The Early Years

Thomas Holcroft was born in 1505 or 1506 and probably at his father's home, Holcroft Hall, near Culcheth, a few miles north-east of Warrington.² He was the second son of John Holcroft, (born c.1450) and his wife Margaret, daughter of Hamlet Massey of Rixton. The family's property in Lancashire was inherited by the descendants of the eldest son John Holcroft (c.1490-1560) who, as Sir John, was a Justice of the Peace for Cheshire between 1539 and 1547 and sheriff of Cheshire in 1541 and 1546. Thomas had two known younger siblings who settled in Cheshire: William, who became vicar of Weaverham in 1557, and Jane, wife of Henry Manley of Poulton.

Whilst nothing is known of Thomas Holcroft until he was in his early 20s, it is likely that he went to London in his youth and obtained a position in royal service. There is a strong possibility that the Holcrofts were close to the young Edward Stanley, 3rd Earl of Derby, (c.1508-1572) who at the age of thirteen became earl and was brought up under the king's protection in the wardship of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, who was Lord Chancellor between 1515 and 1529 and head of the young earl's council. Thomas Holcroft was of a similar age to this youthful earl and as a member of a neighbouring Lancashire family may have been one of his companions and through this association became employed as one of Wolsey's staff. It is also likely that Thomas' elder brother John may have already been at court: he certainly served with the earl on the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536; also in 1553 with a force of 430 men from the Derby Hundred of Lancashire; and again in 1557.³ Thomas Holcroft is mentioned a couple of times in the earl's letters.⁴ Firstly, he is named as a witness examined in August 1533 about slanderous remarks made by James Harrison concerning the king and Anne Boleyn's suitability as queen, and the wording of the letter seems to suggest that Thomas was both servant of the king and one of the earl's counsellors. Another letter, dated in March 1534, names him and others as grantees of the advowson of Blakedon church, Somerset, which was in the earl's gift.

Royal Service

Whatever the means of Thomas Holcroft's entry into court circles he seems to have progressed well and quickly to a position of trust and responsibility. Thomas probably started in the humble role of a page before being promoted to some more senior position but by 1528 he served in Henry VIII's household as a 'sewer' - an attendant of fairly high rank in charge of serving meals and the seating of guests on special occasions. However, his every day duties may have been more of an administrative nature. As a 'sewer' he is first referred to in 1528 delivering correspondence between the king and his elder sister, the widowed Queen Margaret of Scotland - seemingly then a trusted servant.⁵ It was during the late 1520s that he worked closely with William Barlow, prior of Bisham and a Privy Counsellor, for on a number of occasions they are named together.⁶ On 3 October King Henry wrote to his nephew, King James V of Scotland, introducing Barlow as '*being sufficiently instructed in the specialties of certain grete and weighty causes*' and that he be given favourable audience and '*credence as unto Our self*'.⁷

In March 1532 Thomas Holcroft occurs as a messenger acting for William Paulet, Comptroller of the Royal Household and Master of Wards, carrying correspondence to Randolph Brereton when Chamberlain of Chester, ordering an enquiry into the property held by the recently deceased Ralph Leycester and other writs. This seems to be Holcroft's first official link with Chester and Cheshire. Paulet was a known friend of both Cardinal Wolsey and of Thomas Cromwell, then Secretary of State and later to be Thomas' boss. His

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employment by Paulet seems to add weight to his holding a senior position within the royal household.

It is in connection with Scotland that Thomas features again during the 1530s and particularly in relation to the Queen whose central aim in her political life was to improve Anglo Scottish relations and it is that context that we need to view Thomas Holcroft's diplomatic missions: the purpose behind the trips were particularly sensitive and Barlow and Holcroft seem to have been the instruments of communication. Queen Margaret wrote from Edinburgh to the Duke of Norfolk in 1534 saying that Barlow and Holcroft had received every facility from King James with whom they had a favourable and long audience. In December she then wrote to her brother King Henry and mentioned the two men, 'his ambassadors', who had delivered his letters and that they would report to him on proposals for a meeting to be had between himself and King James. A similar letter was sent to Thomas Cromwell, then the king's principal secretary and chief minister, informing him that 'Mr William and Thomas' would report to him on their mission.⁸ In the late summer of 1535 Holcroft again journeyed north to take messages and a payment of £200 to Queen Margaret for which Thomas received £33 6s 8d for fifty days service. As the prior of Bisham, was paid £40 expenses for 40 days on the same occasion it would seem that Thomas had the subordinate position perhaps as Barlow's assistant or secretary, nevertheless at 13s 4d (one mark) per day he was well paid. A memorandum written in Cromwell's own hand refers to 'more to be paid': Barlow was to receive £50 and Holcroft £40.⁹ In early 1536 Queen Margaret again persuaded her son King James V to meet with her brother, King Henry, and wrote to the king and Thomas Cromwell announcing the proposed meeting. Holcroft and Barlow were instructed to arrange the meeting between the two kings and also to advise the Scots king about following Henry's lead in seizing church property and renouncing papal authority. However, whilst she was looking forward to a grand event and spent a huge sum in preparation, in the end it came to nothing due to James' obstinacy. Many times she wrote to her brother about her poverty and made appeals for money and security in order that she might not have to 'follow her son like a poor gentlewoman': in response Thomas was sent to the Queen with another £200. In December 1536, Thomas was again in Scotland visiting Queen Margaret on Henry's behalf having been sent to clarify her desires, which had not been evident in her earlier letter, concerning her son James' proposed marriage to the French king's daughter, Madelaine of Valois.

*"nevertheless, for the conveyance thereof to our knowledge, we have for your satisfaction sent unto you at this tyme, our trusty and welbelovyd servaunt Thomas Holcroft, oon of the sewers of our chamber, to whom if youe shall intimate and declare the same, we shall upon his return, frame youe that answer that shall be reasonable..."*¹⁰

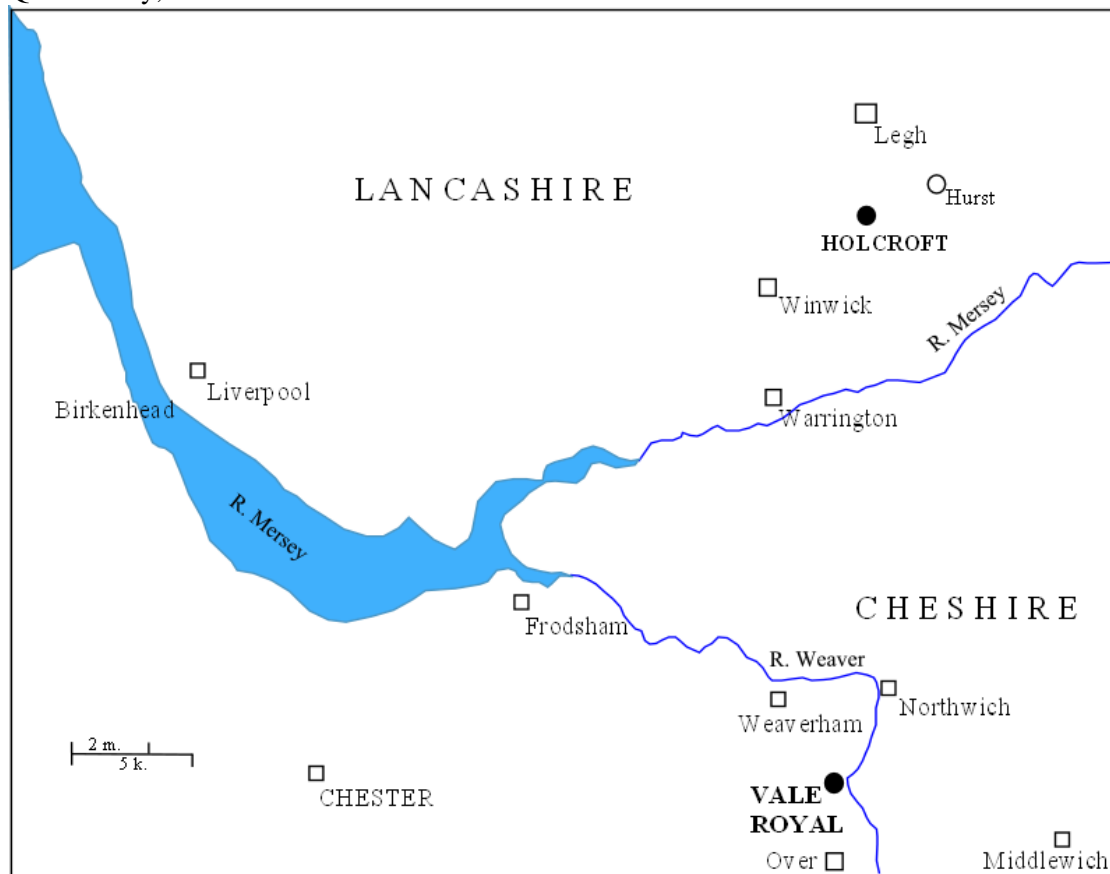
In the reply sent with Thomas Holcroft, King Henry offered his sister 'the office of a brother' if her son, the young king, withdrew anything to which she was entitled. A safe conduct to Scotland was authorised on 15 February 1536/7 for a retinue of sixty people including the Duke of Norfolk and Barlow, then bishop of St Asaph, and which in all probability included Holcroft.¹¹

Thomas Holcroft's work with William Barlow and his constant travels between the court and Scotland meant that he was essentially working for Thomas Cromwell, the king's secretary and Master of the Rolls, and perhaps through his energy and zeal became a valued member of his staff. A man named 'Holcrofte' is listed as a servitor at the coronation of Anne Boleyn in May 1533 and in all probability this will be Thomas.¹² He may have had some influence with his master's family for in January 1536 Hugh Lathom, a Lancashire man, wrote to his kinsman Thomas Lathom urging him to get in touch with his brother 'that he may speak to Mr. Richard Cromwell (Thomas Cromwell's nephew and member of his household) for me' and also to speak to 'Mr. Howcroft for me, and desire him to go with you to Mr. Cromwell'.¹³ In November 1539 Holcroft was one of the courtiers nominated to receive Ann of Cleves at Dover, in preparation of the marriage arranged for King Henry by Cromwell.¹⁴

His faithful service to the crown resulted in the grant of various offices in the late 1530s and

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1540s. He was appointed as bailiff of the duchy of Lancaster in 1536 a position he held for nine years. From 1538 until the 1550s he was receiver of dues in Lancashire and Cheshire. He was appointed a justice of the peace for Cheshire in 1539, along with his brother John.¹⁵ He was named as one of the members of the king's new bodyguard in 1539: one of the 'spears' presumably due to the weapon he bore.¹⁶ He was master forester of Quernmore and Wryesdale, Lancashire, from 1540 for five years. The year 1540 saw him advanced to become an 'esquire of the body' in close attendance on the king, and the recipient of a twenty-one years lease of the manor of Wigglesworth, Yorkshire, which had been in the king's hands.¹⁷ In 1545 he was appointed as sheriff of Lancashire and justice of the peace the following year. He was appointed as a commissioner for musters in 1546; commissioner for the chantries in Cheshire and Lancashire that same year along with his brother Sir John Holcroft. Under King Edward VI he was similarly fortunate being appointed vice-admiral for Lancashire and Cheshire in 1547; receiver of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1552;¹⁸ receiver of the goods of churches and fraternities in Cheshire 1553; keeper of the rolls for Cheshire from 1548 until his death; keeper of Redholme Park, in Bowland Forest, by 1552. He entered parliament as knight of the shire for Lancashire in 1545 and Cheshire in 1553. During Mary's reign he became MP for Arundel in 1554 and, finally, he was made Knight Marshal of England by Queen Mary, an office he held between 1555 and 1558.



The locations of Holcroft Hall and Vale Royal

Holcroft and the Dissolution

Henry's difficulties with the Papacy led to a complete break from the Church of Rome and a declaration that he was Supreme Head of the Church in England by the Act of Supremacy in 1534. As a consequence of this all references to the Pope were removed from church services, prayer books, mass books and rubrics. The monasteries were ordered to be dissolved and their enormous wealth confiscated in favour of the crown under the directions of Thomas Cromwell, who on 21 January 1535 was appointed vicar-general with a commission to organize visitations of all the country's churches and monasteries.

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To enable the government to tax church property more effectively the Court of Augmentations was founded by Cromwell in 1536 as one of a number of financial courts established during Henry's reign. Its purpose was to administer monastic properties and revenues confiscated by the crown: it had its own chancellor, treasurer, lawyers, receivers and auditors. Ten years later the Court of Augmentations was amalgamated with the Court of General Surveyors, which had been established in 1542 to administer crown lands, and then in 1554 the roles of these courts became part of the Exchequer.

It is for his work with the Court of Augmentations under Cromwell that Thomas Holcroft is mainly known. His main function in the late 1530s seems to have been in assisting the commissioners in Lancashire and Cheshire. Holcroft's attitude towards the monasteries, convents and chantries and his effectiveness in carrying out the policy of the Court of Augmentations may well have been influenced by his earlier association with William Barlow, prior of Bisham, who later became bishop of St. Asaph and then of St. David's, whose attitude to the Catholic church and its superstitious rites is well documented. He was in fact a staunch evangelical, an anti-Catholic and collaborator in the Dissolution of the Monasteries and dismantling of church estates.

The earliest reference we have of any dealings with church property is in 1533 when Thomas was causing problems for Furness Abbey being involved with the Earl of Cumberland in attempting to take and occupy the lordship of Winterbourne, Yorkshire, and two farms belonging to the abbey.¹⁹ The abbot in an attempt to influence Cromwell in his plea to retain the estate offered to increase the annuity he held from the abbey from £4 to £6 13s 4d and a lump sum of £10 if he could obtain letters from the king in the abbey's favour.²⁰ By royal mandate Thomas was also in receipt of an annuity of ten marks from the abbey, apparently as a fee for holding courts. Among others who were recipients of annuities were the dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk and the Earl of Wiltshire: Thomas' name among these nobles certainly testifies to his being a person of some standing at that time.²¹

Thomas visited Furness Abbey in March 1537.²² Official records state that the king was to have the 'seniory' of Furness, the barony of Kendal, and the honour of Cokermouth, besides lands in Lancashire. It was also reported that there was a haven and a "pyle" standing nearby which was necessary for its defence. Matters concerning Furness were referred to Holcroft, "*who is expert in such things, to describe at his next repair to the Court*". Robert Southwell, solicitor to the Court of Augmentations, wrote to Cromwell saying that he "*hath referryde all to Mr Holcroft who hath taken upon hym the hole descripcione thereof at his next repayre to the Court yf it shall please the Kyng to command hym, and if ther shall be any good fee annexide thereto, I thynke he shall be intreatyde with small difficulte to take it himself; he hath been very diligent here, for the which he whas put only in trust to pluck down the Church.*"²³ The second most important and wealthy abbey in England was finally destroyed in 1537.

In 1536 the Augustinian Cartmel Priory, Cumberland, came under the Act of Suppression, but the monks were reluctant to give up their life and their home without a fight. The following year, for their open opposition to Holcroft, four of them were hanged, along with ten local tenants, at Lancaster for treason, the priory was stripped of saleable assets, and the monastic buildings were largely demolished. Holcroft was appointed as one of the lessees of Cartmel Priory along with Lord Monteagle, the Earl of Derby and Sir Thomas Butler. Again his name amongst such eminent person again indicates his social and political standing during the 1530s. Eventually the site of the priory together with its possessions in Lancashire and Cheshire were granted in November 1540 to Thomas Holcroft, 'esquire of the body', but he later exchanged it for Vale Royal.²⁴ The annual worth of these properties had been estimated in 1536 at £212 12s. 10½d., but by the time Cartmel reverted back to the crown in nine years later, Holcroft had managed to triple the rental value, making a few hundred pounds in profit over five years.

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In the aftermath of the rebellions in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire of 1536 and 1537 against Henry VIII's policies, both religious and financial, known as the 'Pilgrimage of Grace', Thomas acted as a juror, though perhaps not an impartial one, at the trials of Sir Robert Constable and Sir Francis Bigod, two of the leaders: Constable was hung at Hull in June 1537 and Bigod at Tyburn on 2 June.

Jointly with his elder brother, Sir John, Thomas Holcroft was appointed as the receiver of the lands of the dissolved Lenton Priory, Nottinghamshire, and was named as one of king's commissioners present there in May 1537 just before the prior and monks were thrown into prison accused of high treason for which they all suffered the ghastly penalty.²⁵ Both brothers subsequently surrendered their interests in 1545 to a Richard Tenaunt who then became receiver.²⁶

In 1537 Holcroft was in correspondence with the abbot of Burton, for on 18 May the abbot wrote to Thomas thanking him for reducing his charges: the letter was forwarded on to Thomas who was then at Lenton.²⁷ It seems likely that in the first half of the year Thomas had journeyed down from Furness, by way of Burton, to Lenton.

Lancaster Friary was probably surrendered in 1539 and the crown, on 18 June 1540, sold it with the friaries of Preston and Warrington and associated lands to Thomas Holcroft, 'esquire of the body to the king'.²⁸ A few years later Holcroft sold Preston Friary to Oliver Breers, recorder of Preston who took up residence there, and Warrington to a John Cowdwall and some land to Sir Richard Houghton – no doubt at a profit.²⁹ For the three friaries Holcroft paid the sum of £126 10s but when he came to sell one of them in 1543 he received that same sum for just one and reserved to himself rights to the building stones.

Again in 1540 Thomas Holcroft 'esquire of the Royal Body', for £650. 5s. 4d., had a grant of the messuages, cottages, lands, and other assets in Cadishead, Magna Wolden, and Parva Wolden, in Lancashire, and the manor of Willington, Cheshire, all which had belonged to the Cistercian monastery of Whalley, Lancashire; also the site of the manor of Wygglesworth, Yorkshire. All of this was to be held by a rent of 41s. 3d.³⁰ He also has a grant of both moities of the manor of Billington, and the manors of Lathom, Bickershaw, and Cadishead, Lancashire.

The priory at Lytham was a cell of Durham priory and between 1535 and 1540 the prior and convent of Durham withdrew the monks from Lytham and let the property of the cell to Thomas Dannel for eighty years at a rent of £48 19s. 6d., perhaps in an attempt to avert confiscation. Following the surrender of Durham, Dannel continued in occupation paying rent to the crown until Queen Mary on 23 July, 1554, gave the cell to Thomas Holcroft, by then Sir Thomas.³¹

For his "costs and pains in surveying of chantries" Sir Thomas was awarded a grant of £26 13s 4d by the Council of Augmentations on 20 March 1546.³²

Holcroft and Vale Royal

For just over two centuries the Abbot of Vale Royal had ruled over the lives of the people of a large portion of central Cheshire. The history of this monastery was plagued with turmoil and disputes with the local communities. Paradoxically, as the management of the estates became more efficient and relations with the tenantry improved so the abbey's downfall occurred.

Within twelve months of his election, the last abbot, John Harwood, had to contend with Thomas Cromwell who had been appointed as Steward of Vale Royal in place of the Earl of

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Shrewsbury. However, before Cromwell's appearance on the scene the name of another who was to be instrumental in the dissolving of the abbey occurs. In July 1535, a grant of a pension from the abbey was made in favour of one of the king's clerks, as required of the Abbot on taking office. The recipient in this case was Thomas Holcroft, then styled as a clerk in royal service.³³

In March 1538, Cromwell wrote to Abbot John to request a lease of the manor of Darnhall as he believed that the abbey had sufficient other manors, farms and parsonages to furnish the monastery with corn, pasture and income. The reply was to the effect that the abbey wished to keep Darnhall as it was their only source of wheat. The abbot also stated that other lands were leased out, that he did not have access to the tithes Cromwell thought he had, and that the abbey's demesne lands contained poor, sandy soil. Cromwell was offered any other lands rent free, although the abbot stood prepared to acquiesce. Abbot John's excuse that other manors and lands had been let was not in any way false; in fact he may have begun a policy of leasing in anticipation of the Dissolution.

On 24 August 1538, the king's warrant was issued to Thomas Holcroft to take the surrender of the Abbey of Vale Royal and to supervise its dissolution.³⁴ Two weeks later the abbot, the prior and thirteen monks handed over the Abbey of Vale Royal to the king's commissioner, but not without controversy.³⁵ Holcroft may have used some form of subterfuge to obtain the signatures, or else forgery, for on 9 September, Abbot John wrote to Cromwell saying that neither he nor any of his brethren had consented to the surrender as they did not consider that the commission had required it. In fact, on realising what was required they had prepared a bill to appeal against the surrender and that Holcroft had refused to accept it. Despite sickness the abbot travelled from Vale Royal to seek an audience with Cromwell to beg his favour. The matter was in fact referred back to Holcroft who, in support of the validity of the surrender he had secured, suggested several questions be put to the abbot based upon the negotiations that had transpired prior to the surrender, and of certain deals made in the abbot's favour. Holcroft won the argument and by the end of the year Vale Royal ceased to be a monastic institution. The monks left the abbey in December having received dispensation for a change of habit.

Matters between the abbot and royal officials continued to be strained and efforts were made by Cromwell and Holcroft to discredit the abbot. An inquisition for the trial of John Hareware, abbot of Vale Royal, was presented in May 1539. At the View of Frankpledge and Court Leet for the Manor of Over held that month the jurors presented the abbot before Thomas Cromwell, in his capacity as Steward of the Manor.³⁶ The accusations were that the abbot had murdered Hugh Chaloner, one of the monks, by slitting his throat; that he had tried to prevent the tenants of the abbey estates from serving the King and would have had them cast into prison had it not been for the intervention of Sir Piers Dutton and Hugh Starkey; that the abbot had repeatedly asserted that the King's marriage was unlawful and that any licences to marriage issued by his officials were also unlawful; that the abbot's brother, Roger Hareware, condoned insurrections against the King; that the abbot's servants took wood and other items that the bailiffs of Over and Weaverham had seized for the King's use; and lastly that Ralph Bostock, one of the abbot's servants, was a common poacher. It is not known how the abbot managed to defend the action but it does seem that he did so for he continued to receive a pension of £60 a year until 1546.

Of the Cheshire estates the majority went to Holcroft. On 7 March 1542, the site of the abbey, the granges of Connersley, Bradford, Ernesley (or Earnslow), and Merton, Petty Pool Hill and Dam, Bradford Mill, which all lay in the parish of Whitegate, together with Hefferston Grange and Onston Mill in Weaverham, Ernesley House, on the boundary between the two parishes, the pool at Oakmere, woods in Weaverham and Over, tenements in Frodsham and all appurtenances in Weaverham, Acton, Dutton, Bretherton. Gorstage, Whitegate, Frodsham,

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Over, Stanthorne and Capesthorpe were purchased by Thomas Holcroft, esquire, for the sum of £450 10s 6d and subject to an annual rent of £3 5s 8d.³⁷ Three years later, on 1 August 1545, Holcroft, now Sir Thomas was granted the lordships or manors of both Over and Weaverham in consideration of the sum of £464 10s 10d, and an annual rent of £10 0s 4d, on condition he surrender of his manor of Cartmel.³⁸ Repeat grants were made in September 1546 with full ratification of his title to the properties.³⁹

Thomas Holcroft complied with the general instructions "to pull down to the ground all the walls of the churches, steeples, cloisters, fraters, dortes, chapter houses, with all other houses save them that be necessary for a farmer" which were given to those commissioned to dissolve the monasteries. He seems to have lost no time in doing so for he wrote to the King within a few weeks of taking the surrender of the abbey to say that he had "plucked down" the church. Some of the stonework, timber and fittings were re-used in converting the south and west cloisters to build Vale Royal House, whilst the rest was either sold off or re-used by Holford in a variety of building works in the area including the re-building of St Mary's church, Weaverham and repairs to Acton Bridge, Weaverham. Hugh Starkey of Oulton may have purchased some of the stone work for the remodelling of St. Chad's, Over. Starkey was the purchaser of Knight's, one of the abbey's granges. The Mainwaring family who purchased Merton Grange from Holcroft, may also have used stones from the abbey when building their new house; architectural stonework fragments were found in the foundations when the house was demolished last century. From about 1540, Holcroft made the site of Vale Royal his family home and it remained so until 1615.

Little is recorded about Thomas's life at Vale Royal – perhaps he was rarely there given his commitments in serving the crown. In 1549 there was a serious dispute over a right of way involving a neighbour, Robert Mainwaring of Merton, which resulted in armed conflict.⁴⁰ Acting on Thomas's behalf, and a ring leader of the conflict was a Jeffery Holcroft, either a brother or nephew, who was perhaps resident at Vale Royal looking after Thomas' interests perhaps as steward of the manors of Over and Weaverham. Mainwaring brought a suit against Thomas Holcroft, by then Sir Thomas, which was heard by the Council of the Marches sitting at Ludlow during several months in 1550. Due to Thomas' service in Scotland it had to be adjourned several times. By October Sir Thomas was in London and wrote to the Council of the Marches excusing himself but submitting written testimony. In December an arbitration agreement was formulated: for Sir Thomas the witnesses to his signature were colleagues with whom he had served in Scotland – Sir John Harrington, Sir Francis Leek, Sir John Done and Thomas Dutton.

It seems that the memory of Sir Thomas, and his role in the Dissolution of the Monasteries, lasted in men's minds long after his death. John Braddill of Whalley left a will dated 31 May 1575, seventeen years after Sir Thomas' death, by which he left money "*to my powreste neightburs to cawse them to pray for ...and Sir Thomas Holcrofte, knight, deceased who were all my speciall good maistres wth whom I served during their lyves, and moste specially for Kinge Henry the Eight... by whom my firste risinge and gaine was gotten by byenge and selling of lands and other diverse bargaines*".⁴¹

There can be little doubt that Holcroft used his position at court and his association with Cromwell for personal gain amassing a considerable amount of land and wealth.

Holcroft and the Scottish Wars

During the 1540s Thomas Holcroft was very much involved with affairs in Scotland. In 1537 King James V of Scotland married Madelaine, a daughter of the French King, Francis I. The marriage to the sickly girl was short-lived and after her death the Scottish king married Mary of Guise continuing the Scottish/French alliance much to the concern of the English court. In

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1541 in an effort to encourage positive relations between the two kingdoms King Henry travelled to York for a summit meeting, but King James failed to turn up: a repeat of his earlier obstinacy.

In the summer of 1542, whilst King James was pre-occupied with assisting the French in their dynastic struggles, King Henry ordered the mobilisation of the northern levies and by October war had been declared. At that time Holcroft was sent to Scotland on a mission leading a convoy of carts and horses for the coming conflict.⁴² The Scottish army suffered a massive defeat at Solway Firth in November which can have done nothing to improve James' health for he died in December leaving a six-year old daughter, Mary, to succeed him. In a gesture of friendship Henry ordered the release of prisoners taken at Solway and suggested a marriage between his son Edward and their child-queen, Mary. In December 1543 the Scottish Parliament decided that Henry in proposing the marriage alliance was asking too much of them by requiring all Scots to pay homage and fealty to the English Crown as superior lord and abrogated the treaties previously signed with England and reaffirmed those signed with Scotland. Further a marriage between the young Queen Mary and the Dauphin of France was agreed to which led to the war between 1544 and 1549 often known as the 'War of the Rough Wooing'.

At the beginning of May 1544 an English army led by the Earl of Hertford marched to the Borders and destroyed whatever they could so that the region could not support a landing by the French. The show of force was sufficient for some nobles to swear allegiance to Henry whilst others were so appalled by the wanton destruction they turned to the French for further support. The English army landed at Granton and captured Leith in order to land heavy artillery for an assault on Edinburgh Castle. The next day the troops entered Edinburgh, and set the city on fire. Hertford decided not to lay siege but thoroughly burn the city. According to the English contemporary account, all the houses within the suburbs and city walls were burnt including Holyroodhouse and the Abbey. The English ships at Leith were loaded with looted goods and sailed for home whilst the army returned to England by land, burning towns and villages along the way.

On 11 May 1544 Thomas was knighted by Lord Hertford at Leith, one of a number of Cheshire gentlemen so honoured at that time. Thomas Venables, William Brereton, Randle Davenport, Hugh Cholmondeley, Edward Warren, Hugh Calveley, Richard Egerton, and Laurence Smyth being the others from Cheshire who were also honoured.⁴³

During the early summer of 1544, Holcroft, now styled 'Sir Thomas', was on a secret mission to negotiate with Norman Leslie, the master of Rothes, who had sent two messengers to King Henry suggesting the murder of Cardinal Beaton, the Archbishop of St. Andrews: Beaton, who persecuted Scottish Protestants with great cruelty, was King James's chancellor and ambassador to France and a keen advocate of the Franco-Scottish alliance. The king's brother-in-law, Edward Seymour, Lord Hertford, was ordered to secretly arrange for Holcroft to go to Scotland to negotiate with the lord of Rothes; he and the two Scottish messengers travelled by ship to the mouth of the river Tay as it was considered too dangerous to go by land.⁴⁴ Whether or not Henry ever agreed to the plan the cardinal was murdered by Leslie and others on 29 May 1546, his corpse being mutilated and hung from the windows of his castle of St Andrews. Rothes was eventually tried for the murder but managed to get himself acquitted. In mid-June Holcroft wrote to the king about his mission and sent letters via the Earl of Hertford.⁴⁵

In September 1545, an attack by the English on the Borders destroyed crops and farms and acted with great brutality. It seemed to many Scots that King Henry was trying to starve them into submission. In December 1545 Sir Thomas Holcroft was with Lord Hertford at Newcastle when King Henry issued instructions sending Sir Thomas and a Thomas Bishop to

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meet with the Earl of Lennox, a Scottish nobleman sympathetic to the English cause, in order that they might 'practise' with the Scots to obtain custody of Queen Mary, or to at least 'sow dissension amongst the Scottish court and gain intelligence'. The memorandum stated that Sir Thomas Holcroft was to be made privy to all things concerning the proceedings of the Earl of Shrewsbury, then lieutenant general in the north, or of Thomas Bishop.⁴⁶ It was at this time that it was reported that Sir Piers Dutton of Dutton, Cheshire, had died leaving the office of rider of Delemere Forest vacant prompting Lord Hertford to request that the position be granted to Sir Thomas for his services.⁴⁷

During 1546 Sir Thomas returned to Lancashire for in that year he received £154 for 'coats and conduct', in mustering two hundred soldiers out of Lancashire for Dover and service in France particularly the defence of Boulogne.⁴⁸ English military affairs on the Continent necessitated a peaceful northern border which prompted Henry to again treat with the Scottish government.

On 28 January 1547 the nine years old Edward VI became king under the care of his uncle Edward Seymour, Lord Hertford, now the first Duke of Somerset. He devised a new strategy to bring the Scots to heel and win the hand of Mary for his young sovereign. He hoped to not only successfully invade Scotland, but also to establish permanent garrisons in strategic positions across the country, holding it in virtual subjugation and reducing the need for a huge army to be kept in the field. Early in September 1547 he led a well-equipped army into Scotland. The army was composed of the usual county levies armed with longbows and bills. In support there were several hundred German mercenaries armed with firearms known as arquebusiers, cannons and 6000 cavalry which included Italian mounted arquebusiers, commanded by Lord Grey of Wilton. In total about 17000 men.

The English army advanced from Berwick along the coast supported by the fleet, and also by another force marching up from Carlisle under the Earl of Lennox as a diversionary tactic. The main English army was opposed by Earl of Arran with an army of pikemen archers and 2000 light cavalry under the Earl of Home: a total of about 22000. They occupied the west bank of the River Esk to bar the English advance, with the Firth of Forth on their left flank and boggy terrain on the other they seemed to have an ideal position. Cannon and arquebuses were established to fend off the English fleet. After some initial chivalric skirmishes which cost the Scots dear the armies clashed at Pinkie Cleugh, near Musselborough, on Saturday 10 September, putting the Scots to rout. This battle was both the last major battle between the two kingdoms and also the first 'modern' battle, in that it combined infantry, artillery, cavalry, together with a naval bombardment. Despite this setback the Scottish government still refused terms and instead smuggled Queen Mary out of Scotland to France for marriage to the Dauphin, Francis.

Whilst it is likely that Sir Thomas fought at this battle with Lancashire levies it is not known for sure. It is just as likely that he teamed up with Lennox's force in the west. However by the winter he was back in London, for early in 1548 Holcroft was charged with taking £200 to Mr Ulvedale, the treasurer of the northern garrisons, who was then authorised to pay Sir Thomas 23s 6d a day from 3 March until his 'revocation', whilst on the king's business, along with pay for thirty officers and 100 men as conduct money from Lancashire to Carlisle.⁴⁹

Following the Battle of Pinkie fortifications were established in the Borders of which the largest was at Haddington where Sir Thomas was based at times during 1548 and 1549. Its importance stemmed from it being situated on a strategic route to Edinburgh and its proximity to the sea, about four miles distant, from which the garrison could be kept supplied. By the end of February 1548 Lord Grey of Wilton had captured the town. A little later work began on strengthening its defences and under the directions of Sir Thomas Palmer, a military engineer, the town was enclosed within a geometrically shaped fortress of the latest Italian

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design; a relatively low construction with many triangular bastions covering each other and making cannon attack largely ineffective. The construction work was carried out by soldiers and labourers known as 'pioneers'. Palmer, as the captain of Haddington, a Sir Richard Lee and Holcroft reported to the king's council on progress and of problems with men falling sick or deserting, and a lack of provisions.

During 1548 instructions were issued by the king and his council to both Sir Thomas Holcroft and Sir Francis Leek as commissioners to repair all the king's fortresses in the north taking with them a Mr John, an engineer: Holcroft receiving a warrant for £200 and Leek £100 for their expenses.⁵⁰ They were to particularly address issues of their state, strength men and victuals; supply what was lacking; ensure that men were at their posts and well armed; see to the repair of Lawther, and to levy several hundred pioneers to work on the forts, and levy the troops of the bishopric of Durham and Northumberland. German troops from Borthie were to be relocated and Borthie, Haddington and other garrisons victualled for six months.⁵¹ In April 1548 it was reported by Lord Grey of Wilton to Somerset that Sir Thomas was 'sore sick' but it seems he recovered fairly quickly.⁵²

Sir John Luttrell the captain of Broughty Castle which dominated the Tay and Dundee wrote to "the ryght worsshypfull and my verye fryndes Sir Thomas Holcroft and Sir Francis Leyke ether of them" on 11 April 1548:

"We lack biscuit, beer, and butter for the forts here. The fish is very rotten, and we must have fresh with all speed. We cannot convey from the "watersyde" quickly, having no help but the soldiers' hands, which are never idle working on the forts. I have written to the Council to send 10 or 12 able horses and 2 carts, which would be a great help in drawing lime stone, &c. There is feeding for them here, if some oats were sent for "provender." Desiring you to put your helping hand thereto, and also for "good plentyffe" of lime stone, coal and men to burn it, with the 30 masons I wrote last to you for. My servant the bearer shall advertise you of other necessary wants. I most heartily desire you, if my servant cannot receive the whole pay, it may please you "to comande hym a good prest," for things I have got for my soldiers, and others as he shall declare. At the King's fort of Broughty."⁵³

It was further ordered that whilst Sir Thomas visited the forts Leek was to remain at either Norham, Roxburgh or Fernihurst to levy men and ships and to convey victuals to Borthie. The castle of Home was to be blockaded and crops around the town destroyed. Soldiers had to wear tunics with a red cross and any Scotsman refusing to wear the cross would be treated as an enemy. During June Sir Thomas seems to have accompanied Lord Grey of Wilton towards Dunbar before being returned to Haddington with his 'band' who were described as being 'not only good soldiers, but painful workmen'.⁵⁴ A report dated 9 July 1548 from Sir Thomas Palmer to Somerset on affairs at Haddington said that the Lord Lieutenant accompanied by 'Mr Holdcroftewho is never ydle', lay at Pease with nearly a thousand men to keep the passage open.⁵⁵ Both Palmer and Holcroft signed a report sent to Somerset from Haddington on 11 July.⁵⁶ A further report to Somerset dated 9 August said that there was much skirmishing at Haddington and that 'Mr Holcroft serveth valyauntly'.⁵⁷ By 9 January 1549 Holcroft and Leek were expected at Newcastle,⁵⁸ and had done so by 24 January 1549 when the two men issued a report from Anwick castle regarding the fortification of Holy Island and the mustering of troop in Roxburghshire.⁵⁹

In response to their defeat at Pinkie and the presence of the English army in numerous forts throughout the Borders, the Scots looked to France for assistance, and on 16 June 1548 the first French troops arrived in Leith, soon to total 8,000 men. Whilst Haddington was garrisoned by the English army it came under constant threat from the Scots, French and their allies and under permanent siege from the beginning of July 1548: by as early as 16 July matters there so bad that the French were likely to take the town and fort. To relieve Haddington a large army was mustered numbering 12,000 infantry and 1,800 cavalry arrived,

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under the command of the Earl of Shrewsbury, and supported by a fleet of warships in the Firth of Forth. The list dated 13 August 1548 shows that Sir Thomas had charge of 350 men in the vanguard of 3,000 men under Lord Latimer, along with other Cheshire captains such as Sir Laurence Smyth, John Booth, Edward Sutton, Randle Mainwaring, Sir William Davenport and Sir John Leigh.⁶⁰ On 23 August 1548 the army was camped at 'Spyttell hill near Longnidry' from where a letter was sent to the Protector signed by the Earl of Shrewsbury and others including Sir Thomas. This advised the government that they needed supplies if they were to succeed in their mission to relieve Haddington and go on to fortify Musselborough. Failure to receive the necessary victuals would result in failure and then they would need instructions as to how to disband the army which included the German and Spanish contingents.⁶¹ The Scots and French withdrew and for the time being Haddington was relatively safe though still under siege.

Throughout the siege there were many skirmishes. On one occasion Sir Thomas Palmer and Holcroft set off to attack the enemy from Berwick to give some relief to the town: Palmer led the cavalry and Holcroft the foot.⁶² Unfortunately they were beaten off leaving many slain, injured and captured. Sir Thomas managed to escape into Haddington, but Palmer was captured. Sir Thomas' diligence at Haddington received commendable words from William Lord Grey, head of the English army in Scotland, in April (1549) saying that his work, and that of others, made it 'the fairest town ever fortified in these parts, and the "daunter" of Scotland, and has already subdued all the country except the house of Yester [Ester] kept by the Spaniards'.⁶³

When not at Haddington, Holcroft based himself at Berwick from where he regularly sent dispatches, two or three times a day, to the Lord Protector keeping him and the council up to date. It seems Holcroft had a number of spies on whom he could rely to furnish him with intelligence concerning the enemy's strength, their commanders' plans and placements around Haddington.⁶⁴ In fact it seems that Sir Thomas during 1548 and 1549 took charge of part of the English spy network in Scotland, spending over £400 of his own money in the process.⁶⁵ On 1 July he reported from Berwick on the imminent departure of the queen to France, "We hear 4 galleys and 6 ships (2 of them Scots) sailed 3 days ago for Dunbarton, to take the young Queen to France." Adding that "the spy that brought this word, is one that of all others we most trust."⁶⁶

During September 1548 Holcroft was at the fort of Dunglass from where he wrote to Cecil.

As these "artycles" seem to you, make my lord's grace privy to them.

First—I hear the King disbursed last year 14,000l for victuals, but of no money received, though the captains who got it, keep it in their hands. Also I know divers captains dead not worth 5d. this twelve month, had 300l and 400l and more in their purse, taken for victuals, and many more also—which if not called for in time, the King shall be a great loser.

Also the King has laid out this year above 14,000l, and I think it were good that all things due till last Michaelmas should be paid for; and if my lord's grace think good, the next Michaelmas might be brought in withal, for payment of what the captains have received; and what remains in the King's fort.

And I would my lord's grace commissioned M^r Brende, Thomas "Goore," and Stonehouse, &c. to look into these things, and no captain henceforth to get victuals but these to be defalked on his next pay.

Also besides the daily ward at the gates of Haddington, his grace should have 3 warders on each curtain, 2 on each bulwark, and 1 on each flanker, to stay any one stealing in or out, or approaching the ditches. "I am tender" over that town, for the honour the King, my lord's grace and England have gained by it.

I must desire you to move his grace to licence the Bishop of Chester, who is blind and old, to stay at home from Parliament this winter, if it holds; also that his grace thank M^r Controller for me—for when his grace granted me the College of Ripon, saying, 'I would it weare a gud one,' there is no less thanks due than if it had been so. "The ferme

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of the holle will not ryse unto me above xxvli., bot I have had M^r Controllers favor and quycke spede in the same as mych as I cold well desyre." And being a suitor for my servant for a litle chantry in Lancashire of 3l. 10s. yearly, if M^r Controller had been "weyed" by his friends or money, there was such labour in my absence, that he had not got it; but M^r Controller has been good therein. I would rather have lost Ripon than have had my servant prevented in my absence.⁶⁷

That same month Sir Thomas and Sir Richard Lea reported to the king's council that soldiers were falling sick and deserting due to the lack of provisions at Haddington which prompted them to order Lord Grey to remedy matters and punish the deserters.⁶⁸ Two months later matters were not improved for on 1 November 1548 a letter to Somerset describing the state of Haddington, with a garrison stricken by plague:

The state of this town pities me both to see and to write it; but I hope for relief. Many are sick and a great number dead, most of the plague. On my faith there are not here this day of horse, foot, and Italians, 1000 able to go to the walls, and more like to be sick, than the sick to mend, who watch the walls every 5th night, yet the walls are un-manned.

In January 1549 the king wrote to Sir Thomas and Sir Francis Leak instructing them to repair the forts using the services of a Mr John, an engineer. Both men were to review the state of the forts, their strength and their need of victuals and to then supply what was lacking. All men receiving wages were to be at their posts and well armed. A levy of between 500 and 600 men to work on the forts was authorised whilst levies of troops from the Bishopric of Durham and from Northumberland were to be deployed in both guarding the forts and annoying the enemy. Ships at Newcastle were put at their disposal for the shipments to Borthie. Further instructions were issued for crops around the castle of Home to be destroyed and for a blockade to be mounded cutting the occupants off from their victuals.⁶⁹

In May 1549 instructions were sent to Holcroft, Sir John Harrington, Sir Frances Leek, Cotton and John Brend who had been appointed as commissioners to oversee the exchange of prisoners.⁷⁰ The following month he wrote to the Earl of Shrewsbury from his quarters in Berwick promising to do all he could to locate one of the earl's servants taken prisoner by the Scots.

When the second Earl of Rutland was given command in Scotland it was to Holcroft that he was instructed to turn for advice on the supply of men, materials and food. Holcroft at this time seems to have been in a position that he could write directly to the Protector and offer advice. In a letter to William Cecil written from the camp at Stichel by Hume Castle, on 2 August 1549, he mentions having written 'a long letter to his grace' concerning the captain of Haddington. He goes on to mention a plan as to how to reward those who had served there without a "great charge to the king" and proposed compiling a book detailing men and their services and ways in which they might be rewarded with grants of offices and lands from the conquered area thus strengthening the frontier. He mentioned specific people who needed reward, though he could not recommend M^r Wilton the gentleman porter of Haddington, for his desire, to keep the fort of Holy Island, for the captain there has served long.⁷¹ His letter to Cecil displays concern for the man's 'long sickness' and is almost apologetic for writing to him and displays some frustration with a Mr Stanhope, a brother-in-law to Hertford and a leading figure in the royal entourage, to whom he had written many times without reply. He may also have wished to return from Scotland for he says:

"I can claim no promise of you for calling me home, only your good will, which I doubt not unless sickness has altered you. But if I get no help from my lord great Master, M^r Secretary Smith and you, I will not write to M^r Stanhope, but to my lord's grace himself, by whom I know I shall speed."⁷²

The English withdrew because they were out of supplies, many of their men had died from disease or during the Scottish night raids, and more French re-inforcements had

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arrived. The English and their mercenary forces, which included German and Spanish professional soldiers, evacuated Haddington on 19 September 1549, travelling overland to Berwick upon Tweed. Reports reaching Cecil from Haddington that month 1549 commended Holcroft's endeavours, "I assure you it [Haddington] had been French ere this, but for Master Holcroft, who has served as few men living would and with such liberality as is wonderful and without him, as I be saved, all thinges here wold ronne backwards to fast. He is worthy to be considered above all others".⁷³

When the Scottish wars finally came to an end instructions were issued by the Privy Council in July 1550 for an annuity of £100 to be paid to Holcroft 'until better provided for with some other office or preferment of better value'. In addition a warrant was issued to the Receiver general of the Duchy of Lancaster to pay him £112 7s as arrears of pay from the time he was in Scotland along with £400 to defray his costs for 'espialles during the warres there'.⁷⁴

Holcroft's achievements in Scotland were to be remembered in 1557 when Shrewsbury was sent north to reinforce the border the Privy Council wrote him a letter suggesting they were to send him Sir Thomas Holcroft as 'being a man of skill in matters of warre to thonde his Lordship shulde use his advise and service when needs shall be'.⁷⁵ As, at that time, he was serving as the Queen's knight marshal (see later) another was despatched in his place.

In July 1557 letters were sent to Sir Thomas for the advancing money to the Earl of Derby to discharge the coat and conduct money for 300 footmen levied in Lancashire and Cheshire for service in the North with a promise of a warrant for the same when Her Majesty returned.⁷⁶

In June 1558 the Privy Council sent a letter to Sir Thomas informing him that a Sandy Pringle, a Scotsman, was being ordered by the Lords for certain reasons to withdraw from the north and to remain for the winter with Sir Thomas and that he was to inform the council of his arrival.⁷⁷ Perhaps Pringle had been aiding the English cause and had been one of Holcroft's spies.

Holcroft and Politics

Given Sir Thomas' not insignificant role at court and his service to the Duke of Somerset, chief regent of the young Edward VI, it is perhaps not surprising that he should have been involved in the political controversies and intrigues of the times.

Late in 1549 Somerset's rule became subject of severe criticism from within the Privy Council and he was arrested for mismanagement of the Realm and placed in the Tower of London in October 1550 but released in the following February. His freedom was short-lived for in October 1551 he was again arrested this time on a charge of high treason. As one of Seymour's allies, Holcroft was himself arrested on 18 October 1551 and confined in the Tower the day after the Duke and Duchess of Somerset and Lord Grey, a relative of Holcroft's by marriage, had been taken there. It was ordered that no one be allowed to speak to the prisoners otherwise than in the presence of the Lieutenant of the Tower and on 25 October Sir Edward North and others were sent to interrogate Sir Thomas.⁷⁸ For his loyal support to Somerset, who was executed in January 1552, it seems that Sir Thomas languished in the Tower for almost twelve months. In June 1552 he was interviewed by the Attorney General, after which instructions were sent to the Lieutenant of the Tower to bring Sir Thomas Holcroft and the late Duke's steward Sir John Thynne, before the court on 19 June. On appearing before the court Sir Thomas was required, upon a bond of 500 marks, to surrender his office of Receiver of the Duchy of Lancaster and to answer for any debts he might owe from his term of office.⁷⁹ However he was sufficiently trusted to be elected Member of Parliament for Cheshire in March 1553.

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On 6 July 1553 Edward VI died of a lung infection to be followed by the Catholic Queen Mary following an abortive attempt by the Duke of Northumberland to place the Protestant Lady Jane Grey, the grand-daughter of Henry VIII's younger sister Mary, on the throne. Despite his Protestant leanings and his support for Somerset, Sir Thomas Holcroft was unaffected by Northumberland's fall and convinced the Privy Council of his loyalty to the new regime to become a trusted servant of the royal court and even find favour with the queen. Perhaps he had powerful friends at court and within the Duchy of Lancaster who were prepared to vouch for him.

During May and June 1554 Holcroft was in Southampton to meet with ambassadors from Spain on instructions of the Privy Council, however the Spanish fleet did not drop anchor until 20 July.⁸⁰ During April, in preparation of the king's arrival, the Earl of Arundel, in his capacity of Lord Steward to both King Philip and the Queen, nominated Sir Thomas Holcroft to confer with Briviesca de Muntatones, a Spanish magistrate or judge, as to the steps to be taken to promote peace, moderation and a good understanding between England and Spain.⁸¹ This was especially necessary due to Philip of Spain having his own household which would have to work alongside the Queen's own household. A judicial commission was then established to adjudicate on disputes involving servants from the different households. De Muntatones and Holcroft, who was described as a 'learned Englishman', were delegated powers allowing them the right of seizing, arresting and imprisoning any among those who followed the Court whom they might find guilty of aggression or crimes against one another; and if the guilt were of such a nature as to entail the death-penalty they might proceed jointly to give sentence and order execution even for civil cases.⁸² Soon after Philip of Spain had landed in England he distributed gold chains to various English courtiers and servants, either as an act of generosity or else to curry favour: Sir Thomas was one of twenty-two named individuals who received a chain, his being worth 150 crowns.⁸³ He likewise received another chain worth 200 crowns in July and this time his name is amongst those including the Earls of Arundel and Derby who each received a chain worth 2000 crowns.⁸⁴ Through his work with De Muntatones, Sir Thomas would have had contact with King Phillip's household, but he may have had some influence there through another as to King Philip's household one of Sir Thomas' fellow Lancastrians, Lord Strange, son of the Earl of Derby, was appointed a gentleman of the chamber. Whether Sir Thomas attended the marriage between Philip of Spain and Queen Mary held at Winchester on 25 July 1554 is not known, but given his position it is highly likely. There can be little doubt that Sir Thomas' work with the Earl of Arundel in the negotiations leading to the Spanish marriage prompted his nomination and election as MP for Arundel that year. At that parliament, the second of Mary's reign, opened on 2 April the marriage treaty had been ratified and the treason laws extended to include the future new king.

During 1555 he was commissioned to enquire into offences of 'coining' and was involved in arresting perpetrators. The offence punishable by death as a matter of high treason included acts of counterfeiting money, clipping coins for pieces of silver and gold which could be melted down to produce counterfeit coins, possessing coining equipment and colouring base metal coins intending to pass them off as of higher value. A letter dated March 1555 sent to the Mayor of Chester informed him that Sir Thomas was to make enquiries of a Patrick Colquoshone at the city sessions and that if there was sufficient evidence to indict him of the offence of coining and to 'send him up' (to London). Then in October the following year Sir Thomas was required to take the same man from his custody to the sheriff of Chester. In May 1555 the Privy Council ordered Holcroft to take Stephen Browne from the Marshalsea prison to face charges at Norfolk, and to apprehend a man named Toly in London with the aid of the mayor and sheriff. All those arrested for coining were to be examined by him and a report sent to the Privy Council.⁸⁵ In October 1556, when Knight Marshal, he was ordered to receive in his Marshalsea prison two men, one a Frenchman, accused of uttering 'lewd words'

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and also to arrest two men accused of robbery: the sheriff and mayor of London were ordered to assist him.⁸⁶

In June 1555 Sir Thomas was in trouble over a debt of £400 owed to the crown and he was ordered to pay up within two weeks. Exactly what this debt was for is not known, but it is likely to have been as a result of one of his official duties and presumably he paid the money or entered into an agreement about its future payment.⁸⁷ That same month, despite his Protestant leanings and his reputation as a speculator of abbey properties, great favour was shown on Sir Thomas when he was made Knight Marshal by Queen Mary. This was a position within the royal household of great power and influence. The marshal of the sovereign's house, was authorized to hear and determine all pleas of the Crown, to have cognizance of transgressions within the royal household, and to punish offences committed within the 'verge', that is within twelve miles of the monarch's presence: his court and prison were known as the Marshalsea. There is every possibility that he was recommended to the queen by the Earl of Arundel under whom he had had a similar role in keeping the peace between the English and Spanish households the previous year. Militarily the knight marshal had a responsibility for the defence of the realm and perhaps Sir Thomas' experiences in Scotland contributed towards his selection for the post. The previous holder of the office, Sir Ralph Hopton, had had some issues with Sir Thomas for on surrendering his office he released Sir Thomas from all actions, quarrels and demands he had made against him whilst Knight Marshal.

Holcroft later seems to have used his position as knight marshal take opportunities to help Protestants falling foul of the new regime. John Strype, the 17th century author of a work on Thomas Cranmer, claims that

*'the knight marshal Sir Thomas Holcroft, the under marshal and the knight marshal's secretary, were all secret friends of the Protestants and when designs were to take any of them some signification was often brought them that search would within some few be made for them and therefore that they should leave their lodgings and conceal themselves. And good men were under their hands in prison they would all occasions to shew them kindness as far as safely might.'*⁸⁸

Shortly after Sir Thomas became Knight Marshal, Thomas Mountain, a London minister, was a prisoner in the Tower when examined by Sir Thomas and others about a certain pamphlet he had in his possession that was critical of King Phillip and Queen Mary. He was then imprisoned in the Tower for three months before being transferred to the more comfortable conditions at the Marshalsea under Sir Thomas' charge. Later he was moved to Cambridge on the orders of Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester, then Lord Chancellor, to answer a charge of high treason having served in the duke of Northumberland's army but was eventually acquitted. Nevertheless, on returning to London he was spotted by one of Gardiner's spies. Enraged he summoned Holcroft and demanded to know why Mountain was at liberty and ordered his immediate arrest, but Holcroft's secretary warned Mountain to leave the city and make good his escape.⁸⁹ Whether or not Sir Thomas was party to this is not known for certain. Edwin Sandys, when vice chancellor of Cambridge University and master of St Catherine's a staunch supporter of the Protestantism, and later to become bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York, who had been imprisoned in the early days of Mary's reign in the Tower, but later transferred to the Marshalsea, became friends with Sir Thomas. It seems that his keeper sued for his release from prison with the Queen and with the support of Gardiner.⁹⁰ By March 1558 Sir Thomas had been replaced as marshal by Thomas Harvey, a man with Catholic inclinations who, like Holcroft, had begun his royal service as a sewer in Henry VIII's household.

There is no record of the reasons why Sir Thomas' was replaced, but it is perhaps significant that he died within five months. It may be that he had fallen ill and could not carry out his duties. Otherwise we are left with the suggestion that he was under suspicion of having

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helped, or of at least being lenient towards, notable Protestants and subject to investigation. Interestingly, the *History of Parliament* has recorded that Sir Thomas was under arrest and in the custody of Michael Wentworth, cofferer of the Household, who had a house in Wenham a place apparently mentioned in Sir Thomas' will.⁹¹ Had he fallen foul of the Marian regime? If so his death coming so shortly after his demotion from the office of Knight Marshal might not be a coincidence. But in all probability he died from the flue epidemic that swept through London in the summer of 1558 which resulted in hundreds of deaths.

Sir Thomas' will is dated 25 July 1558, six days before he died, and tells us very little.⁹² His wife Juliana is named as sole executrix and recipient of all his goods and chattels on the understanding she paid his debts, bring up his children and pay his children their portions '*as she will answer me afore Almighty God on the Day of Judgmente*'. He then names as supervisors of the will, his brother Sir John Holcroft of Holcroft and his cousin Gilbert Gerard, a lawyer who was later to become attorney general to Queen Elizabeth (a position he held for over twenty years). Lastly he confirms the grant of twenty-one years leases of tenements he owned in Billington to John Deyne and James Witmare in which they were then residing. For some reason the will was not proved until April 1574.

The will appears to request burial at the 'Parish Church of Wenham', but why should Sir Thomas who styled himself as 'of Valeriall in the Countie of Chester' wish to be buried in a church in Suffolk rather than being taken back to Whitegate or Weaverham, the churches associated with his family home? The most likely explanation is that Wenham is mis-copying by the probate clerks of Weaverham.

No inquisition post mortem was filed in Cheshire but one was filed at Wigan in respect of his Lancashire properties on 3 November 1558 which states that Sir Thomas Holcroft held the manors of Billington, Lytham and Bickershaw and the demesne lands or manors of 'Caddewalhedde' (Cadishead) and 'Wolden' (Great and Little Woolden). It also states he died on 31 July 1558 leaving Thomas Holcroft as his son and heir aged 1 year 3 months and 19 days, i.e. born on 15 July 1557. The manors of Billington, Cadishead and Woolden had originally belonged to the abbey of Whalley.

Family Life

It seems that Sir Thomas married late in life, perhaps about 1551 when in his forties, to a lady who was about twenty years younger and settled at Vale Royal.⁹³ His wife was Juliana, daughter and heiress of Nicholas Jennings of Preston, London and Barking, a skinner and an alderman of the City of London.⁹⁴ Following the death of Nicholas Jennings in April 1532, Thomas' mother-in-law, Margaret (nee Mundy) married again in 1533 to Sir Edmund Howard, a younger son of Thomas Howard, 2nd duke of Norfolk and half brother to both Thomas, the 3rd duke, and Elizabeth Howard mother of Anne Boleyn, King Henry's second wife. When Margaret Howard died on 21 January 1564 she left property in London to her daughters: Dame Juliana, then aged 35; Ann, wife of John Chapman, aged 27; and Margaret wife of Francis Williams, alias Cromwell, aged 20. The last two daughters were clearly children of the Howard marriage. One of Margaret's step-children was, Catherine Howard, who was, briefly King Henry's fifth wife. Important connections therefore which must have helped Sir Thomas' overall position at court.

Sir Thomas and his wife had at least two children: a daughter Isabel (b.1555) and a son also named Thomas (b.17 July 1557). Isabel became a maid of honour to Queen Elizabeth and married Edward Manners, 3rd Earl of Rutland (1548 -1587) on 6 January 1573. Their tomb is in Bottesford Church, Leicestershire, and shows Isabel, who died on 16 January 1606, wearing a ruff with the usual dress of the time under an ermine trimmed mantle, her head supported by a cushion. Her only daughter, Elizabeth, who married William Cecil, Lord

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Burghley, kneels at her feet.⁹⁵ The inscription on the tomb lists the earl's activities in the Scottish "troubles" of the time.

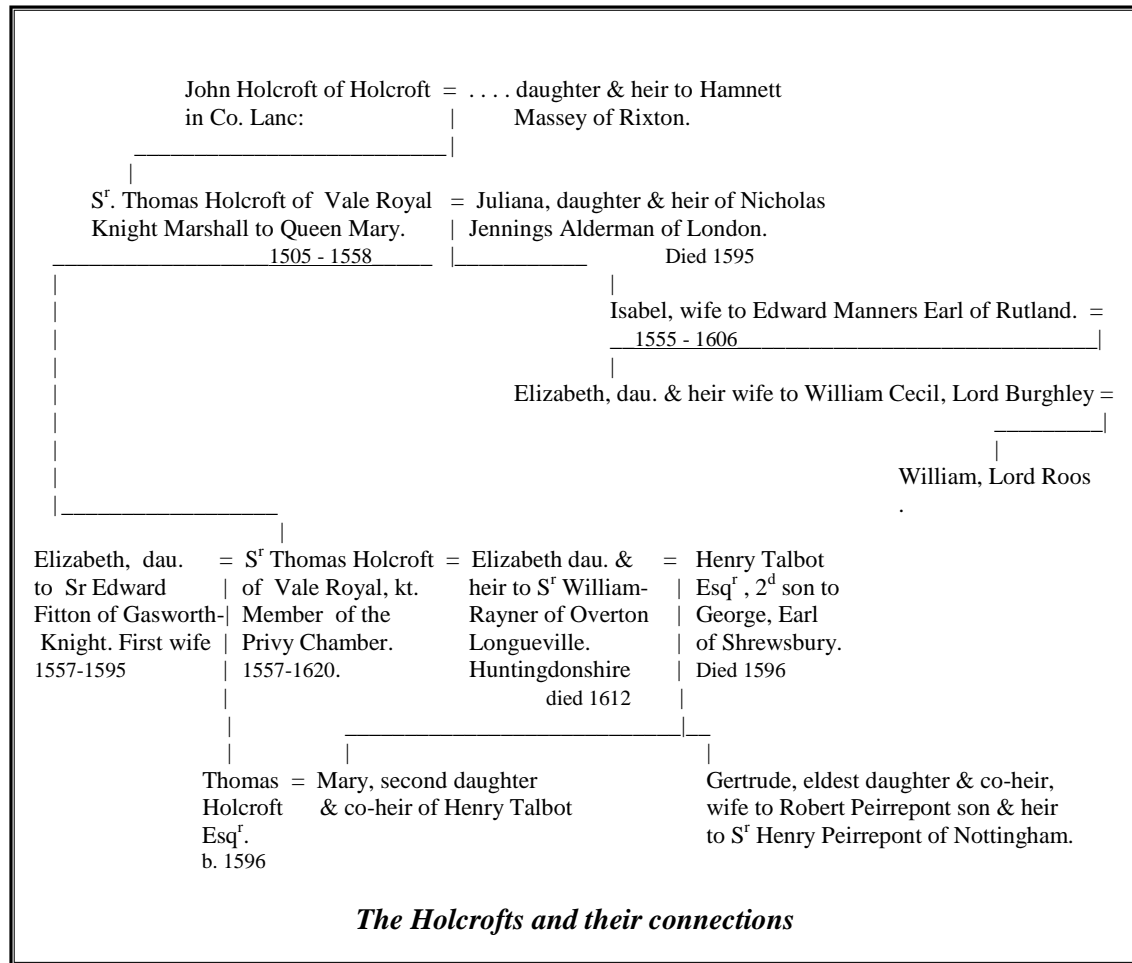
Isabel's marriage was certainly an important match. By an indenture dated 8 January 1575 Edward Manners settled a substantial amount of property in Yorkshire and Essex on his new wife Isabel, her mother Juliana, her brother Thomas Holcroft, and his own brothers Sir Thomas and John Manners and Gilbert Gerrard, (later Sir Gilbert) attorney general to the Queen.⁹⁶ The deed also acknowledged the grant he had received of the rectory of Frodsham made by his mother-in-law at the time of his marriage. The Earl of Rutland's inquisition post mortem, held in 1598, recites a number of property transactions involving his wife, Thomas Holcroft and their mother between 1575 and 1587, once again the transfers the attorney general who was a direct cousin of both Isabel and Thomas Holcroft.⁹⁷

Juliana outlived her husband by thirty-seven years. During her widowhood she was made the subject of a poem – a complimentary address penned by the poet Richard Robinson, who may have lived at Halton, in the 1580s and published in 1589 with the lengthy title of *A Golden Mirrour conteininge certaine pithie and figurative Visions prognosticating Good Fortune to England and all true English Subjects with an ouerthrowe to the enemies: whereto be adjoynd certaine pretie Poems, written on the Names of sundrie both noble and worshipfull*. His work was printed by the Chetham Society in 1851⁹⁸ This work eulogises a number of Cheshire worthies such as the Legh of Adlington, the Shakerley of Hulme, Warburton of Arley, of whom Juliana and Lady Egerton are the only ladies to be so praised. It seems that as a virtuous woman she was held as an example to ladies of the time.

In the parish registers of St Mary's, Whitegate, there is the record of the death of Juliana Holcroft *"The xiiiith daye of Julye being Sondaye betwixt the howres of one and two of the clocke after midnight of the same daye it pleased god to take to his mercie the right worshipfull ladye the Ladie Julian Holcroft of the Vale royall 1595 the 37 yere of her Ma[jes]ty's Raigne that nowe is"*.⁹⁹ Her burial is thus recorded at Whitegate: *'The xxvth daye of August was buried the Right Worshipfull Ladye dame Julian Holcroft of Vale royall Anno predicto'*. However, her burial is also recorded at Weaverham on 25 August, *'Serenissima Domina Juliana Holcroft de Vale Ryall sepult'*.¹⁰⁰ In her will this 'Most Serene Lady' asked to be buried at All Hallows, Barking, so exactly where was she buried? Given that the five weeks between death and burial is unusual, it is possible that the delay suggests her body was in fact conveyed to London, and that the entries at Weaverham and Whitegate are simply testaments to her internment elsewhere.

A further puzzling fact is that on 26 August 1595 Juliana's daughter-in-law, Elizabeth Holcroft (nee Fitton), was laid to rest having died at 4:00am on 19 August according to the Whitegate registers.¹⁰¹ But Weaverham church also claims this burial on 26 August.¹⁰² In this case a period of a week between death and internment is unusual and there seems to be no explanation for it.

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Dame Juliana's will is dated 3 April 1595.¹⁰³ She requested that her body be buried, near to her father Nicholas Jennings, in the chancel of the church of All Hallows, Barking, a church which stands close to the Tower of London. She gave forty shillings to both the church and its vicar. She also gave £10 8s to be bestowed in bread to be distributed amongst twenty-four of the poorest people by the vicar curate and churchwardens: she specified the manner by which this was to be administered. To Lady Stafford, one of the queen's ladies of honour she gave ten yards of black velvet so that she might wear it as a mourning gown. This is probably Lady Dorothy Stafford (wife of Sir William Stafford) who in 1563 was appointed 'Mistress of the Robes' to Queen Elizabeth and one of the queen's favourite sleeping companions, who was only three years older than Juliana.¹⁰⁴ Dame Juliana's household and 'menial' servants, who had served her during the previous twelve months, were not forgotten as each received forty shillings. The vicar of Whitegate, William Heyward, had twenty shillings and a release from his debts to her. A Margaret Reade had £6 13s 4d. A Thomas Edrith had forty shillings for his 'great paynes taken for me at my house' and the bed he slept in at the house in Stretham. During her lifetime she gave 'very lardglie and liberallie' money and other gifts to her daughter Isabell, countess of Rutland. Her late son-in-law was bound to Juliana in the sum of £4000 to perform certain covenants and this she passed on to her daughter with the benefits and profits of the bond, on the condition she made no other claim on the estate. Her cousin William Burroughs, controller of Her Majesty's ships, Richard Leversage of Tooting, Richard Birkenhead, recorder of Chester, and her 'welbeloved servant' William Loo were appointed as executors of the will, except that they were to have no control over the bond of £4000. Her son Thomas, then aged 42, was to be the overseer and supervisor of the will.

Sir Thomas Holcroft II (1557-1620)

Early Life and Marriage

Thomas was born in all probability at Vale Royal on 15 July 1557. Being only an infant when his father died the young Thomas was placed in the wardship of Edward Fitton of Gawsworth (1527-1579) with an allowance of £10 a year.

He married his guardian's daughter Elizabeth on 1 February 1568 at Gawsworth church. At the time he was only eleven years old and she was probably of a similar age which was not uncommon in those days and certainly not in the Fitton family.¹⁰⁵ Incidentally, four years later Elizabeth's brother, the next Edward Fitton of Gawsworth married Alice, daughter and heir of Sir John Holcroft, Thomas' cousin – a marriage which was to cause some problems later. Thomas II's wife Elizabeth died on 19 August 1595 and as mentioned before she was laid to rest at either Whitegate or Weaverham.

Thomas II next made a marriage further up the social scale with Elizabeth, widow of Henry Talbot, third son of George, 6th Earl of Shrewsbury and daughter and heiress of Sir William Reynor of Overton Longueville, Huntingdonshire. By Elizabeth, Henry Talbot had two daughters who on his death in January 1596 shared part of his estate, so conveniently Thomas Holcroft arranged for his own son Thomas, the third so named, to marry Mary the younger of these daughters. Thomas II and Elizabeth's marriage must have almost immediately after Henry Talbot's death as the next Thomas III is said to have been born in late 1596.

For many years after his father's death Thomas II lived in his mother's pocket as he could not get his hands on his patrimony and as such could not take an active part in the affairs of the county. When appointed as a justice of the peace for Cheshire in 1587 it was noted that he was only worth £10 a year, 'because the Lady Holcroft his mother is yet alive'. In May 1590 he and his mother quarrelled over lands in Streatham, Surrey; a dispute in which the queen became involved. In a letter to the Lord Chief Justice and Judges of the King's Bench the queen requested they make a speedy and amicable settlement between the two.¹⁰⁶ Other matters involving property transfers with his brother-in-law, the Earl of Rutland, were instigated by, or through her, as the main party, with Thomas named last.¹⁰⁷

Thomas Holcroft certainly had important connections. His niece was Elizabeth, daughter of Edward Manners, 3rd Earl of Rutland and Baron Ros. In 1589 this Elizabeth married William Cecil, 2nd Earl of Exeter (1566-1640) and together they had a son William Cecil, Lord Ros (1590-1618).¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth's father-in-law, Thomas Cecil, 2nd Lord Burghley (1542-1632) recommended her uncle Thomas to his half-brother Sir Robert Cecil, when Lord Privy Seal, on at least two occasions. On 17 July 1600 Lord Burghley asked for Robert Cecil's favour towards Thomas Holcroft as he was allied to his house through the marriage of Lady Ros, Holcroft's niece. Then on 31 July Thomas wrote from Vale Royal to Sir Robert Cecil thanking him for his favour at the Council table and allowing his suit against Sir Edward Fitton and defending his honour.¹⁰⁹ Then sometime in the summer of 1604, Sir Thomas acted for Lord Burghley in delivering a letter to Sir Robert Cecil which finished with the line '*I strongly recommend the bearer, Sir Thomas Holcroft*'.¹¹⁰ Holcroft's kinsman, another Thomas Holcroft (son of Geoffrey Holcroft of the Hurst, Lancashire) was a servant to Lord Burghley and was admitted to Gray's Inn at Burghley's request in February 1588.¹¹¹

Political Life

During the late 1580s he was appointed a Justice of the Peace for Cheshire, became a knight of the shire for Cheshire and Lancashire and was appointed to several committees, and then in

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1598 became sheriff of Cheshire. His committee work included: a debate on a subsidy on 26 February 1593, a legal matter on 9 March 1593, on recusancy on 4 April 1593, main business 3 November 1601, monopolies on 2 November 1601, he was appointed to the committee dealing with Rochdale on 11 Nov. 1601, fines in Chester on 25 November, and the vicarage of Rostherne 2 December 1601. In 1596 he had a commission of musters in Middlesex. In November 1600 a request was made by the Privy Council to the sheriff of Chester to make Thomas Holcroft to one of the commissioners for muster.¹¹² On 13 November he raised the subject of the Denbighshire election with these words: "*May it please you, M^r Speaker, the County day for Denbighshire is on Thursday next, and therefore there had need be speed made, otherwise there can be no Election this Parliament.*" On 27 Nov he intervened in a debate on the serving of subpoenas on Members of Parliament proving to the House of Commons that whilst many complaints were made none were ever punished and whilst some were summoned none appeared.¹¹³ As an active Member of Parliament, Thomas would have been present in the chamber with such national figures and heroes as Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake and Sir Francis Bacon.

His connections and political ability ensured that Thomas Holcroft became a member of the Privy Council as early as 1593 and received the order of knighthood in 1603 at York on the arrival of King James from Scotland.¹¹⁴ He was also appointed a gentleman of the privy chamber by 1613.

In February 1620 Sir Thomas wrote to the Privy Council, and also directly to the king, on the subject of the import of reams of paper. He suggested that a ream of paper amounting to twenty quires ought to contain 500 sheets, but in some cases there had been a shortfall especially those coming from France via La Rochelle due to that fact that since the wars with that country there had been no searching of packs of paper. He therefore requested that he or his deputy have authority to open, check and seal all paper bundles and that merchants be charged one penny for every pack checked over a twenty year period. He agreed to pay into the Exchequer £50 in lieu of the receipt of the fees.¹¹⁵

Disputes

During his lifetime Thomas was involved in a number of disputes the most serious being when only nineteen. In January 1578 he was involved in a duel which left Henry Burgh the eldest son of the William, Lord Burgh, killed and he seriously wounded – he was found guilty of manslaughter a few days later.¹¹⁶ In 1592 he was seriously assaulted by Sir Richard Bulkeley in the house of the bishop of Chester: the matter, which seems to be one of attempted murder, was referred to the Privy Council. They ordered that both men be bound over to keep the peace and instructed the Earl of Derby to investigate: Bulkeley seems to have been somewhat reluctant to co-operate and withdrew to his house in Cheadle with an armed retinue.¹¹⁷ Unfortunately the reasons behind this violent episode or its outcome are not known.

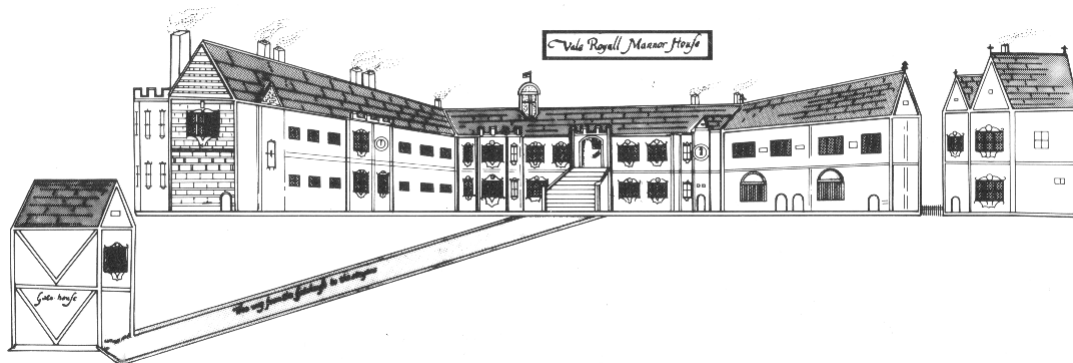
He also pursued at least two family vendettas: in 1598 with the 7th Earl of Shrewsbury over the wardship of his second wife's two young daughters by her first marriage. In 1600 with the Isabel Holcroft, widow of his cousin John Holcroft. On this matter he wrote from Vale Royal to Sir Robert Cecil on 11 July saying he'd been wronged by Isabel, encouraged by Sir Edward Fitton, and for asking Cecil to speak with the Queen for him and requesting his case be moved to the assizes at Lancaster for trial.¹¹⁸ The matter came to the attention of the Privy Council. They wrote to Thomas about a petition made to the Queen by Isabel Holcroft, widow, on behalf of her son concerning an action over title to land made against Sir Edward Fitton and his wife Alice.¹¹⁹ Thomas had commenced proceedings on behalf of his tenant John Wigley in the Court of the Exchequer and then had the matter referred to Lancaster to the supplicants prejudice, '*and sought the subvercion of an auncient howse*'. He and Wigley were ordered, on behalf of the Queen, to stop the action. Despite these instructions Holcroft

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continued and the Privy Council had to write again on 13 July to again order him again to halt proceedings or else advise them why he should not: they also wrote to the justices of the assize informing them of their instructions to Thomas. It seems that there had been a dispute over many years between Sir Edward Fitton as heir general of Sir John Holcroft of Holcroft through his marriage to the daughter and heiress, and John Holcroft as nephew and heir male of Sir John. In all of this Thomas was involved having married Sir Edward Fitton's sister and was in possession of the property on which he had installed his own tenant. On 15 July the Council announced that they had heard from Holcroft's representative and had received information that the trial at Lancaster would be halted and that therefore their lordships would not longer 'intermeddle to stay any proceedings in that cause'.¹²⁰ How the matter was finally resolved is unclear.

Holcroft's Later Years

It seems that in the 1600s Sir Thomas' fortunes declined. He sold Billington in 1602 and then started disposing of much of his Cheshire property between 1611 and 1616 he retired to London. In 1613 Mary Cholmondeley, widow, acquired the site of the monastery of Vale Royal with its lands totalling about 1700 acres in Weaverham, Hefferston, Marton, Cranage, and other places, for £9000. The sale appears to have been completed in September 1615. The manor of Over was conveyed in 1616 to Edmund Pershall and another, perhaps in mortgage. From them it was purchased in 1638, as appears by a fine of that year between Thomas Cholmondeley, plaintiff, and Sir John Pershall, Sir William Pershall, Edmund Peshall, Thomas Pershall, and others as deforciant. The rectory of Whitegate was included in the purchase.



Vale Royal House in 1616

(Taken from an estate plan commissioned by Lady Mary Cholmondeley)

It was in 1612 that Sir Thomas lost his second wife. Dame Elizabeth died at Vale Royal on 28 January 1612 and her funeral service was held at St Chad's church, Over, following which the body was conveyed to her family home at Overton Longueville in Huntingdonshire where she was interred in February.¹²¹ Her funeral procession from Vale Royal to Over church was a grand affair. It was led by two yeomen, presumably her tenants, who were dressed in black coats and held black staves, behind whom came ten poor people each carrying a 'pencell', followed by another two yeomen in coats carrying staves, then more yeomen in coats and servants wearing cloaks. In this first part of the procession there were thirty-two men including 'Mr' Thomas Holcroft all walking in pairs. Next came the mayor of Over on his own in front of a further eight men including Geoffrey Holcroft of Hurst, Lancashire. A pennon was carried in front of the preacher and the hearse. In the rear there were twelve ladies walking in pairs. Finally friends and well wishers tagged along.¹²²

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Thomas Holcroft II's death occurred on Saturday 19 Feb 1620 'he fell down a pair of stairs at his lodgings in the Strand and so bruised his skull that he died the next morning'.¹²³ It is not known where he is buried and it seems that, dying unexpectedly, he died before managing to leave a will as none has been traced.

He was succeeded by a third Thomas Holcroft of whom little is known, other than that he married Mary, a daughter and co-heiress of Henry Talbot. He died in 1627, aged about 30 years, and was buried at Weaverham on 5 April. The registers record that he was 'son and heir of Sir Thomas Holcroft of Vale Royal'.

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APPENDIX ONE

Sir Thomas Holcroft's Will, proved 20 April 1564.
PRO: PCC/Prob/11/47

In the name of God, Amen. The Twentie Fiveth daie of Julie the year of oure lorde god a Thowsande five hundrethe Fiftie and eight. I Sir Thomas Holcrofte of Valeriall in the Countie of Chester knighte being of good and perfate memorie although I am sick and crased in my bodie Considering that Deathe is to every parson certayne at godes will and pleasure and the houre thereof moste uncerteine. Trusting fullie in his mercye and by the merites of his Deathe to be One of them that shalbe saved do make my Laste will and Testament in mann^r and Forme Followinge. First I Bequeathe my sowlw To almighty god oure maker Savioure and Redemer and to the holie Companie of heaven my Bodie to be buried at the Parishe Church of Wenham [Weaverham]. Also I do make Constitute and Ordeine my welbeloved in Christe Juliana my Wife my soole executrix to whom I give all my goodes Chatells leases and all other my goodes moveable and unmoveable Charginge her to paie thereto all my debts and bringe up my Children and geve unto them their porcons as she will answer me afore allmightie God at the Daie of Judgemente. Also I doe Ordaine and make my welbeloved Sr John Holcrofte my brother of Holcrofte to be one of the supervisors of this my will and my Cosen Gilberte Garet to be an other Supervisor of this my last will and Testament trustinge in them this fullie that they will see this my Laste will performed as I would have done their will if it had Channed them as it doth now me. Also I will that where I have made granted to John Warmesley John Deyne and James Whitmare that they shoulde have had leases of their Tenements in Billington for one and Twentie yeares yet to Come for that I have received their fynes In Consideracon whereof I doe fullie grante unto them their Tenements in Billington wherein they nowe dwell for one and Twentie yeares yet to come paying the rente and service accustomed to my here Thomas Holcrofte.

Proved 20 April, 1564, by the oath of William Babham, notary public, proxy of Dame Julian the widow and executrix.

APPENDIX TWO

**Dame Juliana Holcroft's Will, proved 12 March 1596.
PRO: PCC/Prob/11/87**

In the name of God, Amen. I Dame Julyan Holcrofte, of Valeroyall in the Countie of Chester widow this thirde day of Aprill in the yere of our Lorde God a thouwsande five hundred nynty and five and in the seaven and thirtithe yere of the raigne of our most dreaded Sovereaigne Ladie Elizabethe of England France and Ireland Queene defender of the faithe ... beinge God be thanked bothe in good healte and of perfecte memory and callinge to remembrance with what grievous and dangerous sicknes heretofore it hath pleased the same Almightye God to visitt and correcte me And also that to humaine nature nothings is more certayne than deathe and nothings more uncertayne than his appointed tyme and place thereof I have thought good att this tyme for the better preparinge my self to be the more readier for that uncertayne tyme to ordayne make declare and publishe my Last will and testament indented in manner and forme followinge. That is to witt First I doe commende my Spirite and Soule into the handes of the lorde that hath redeemed me. And my will and desire yet is that my bodie may be buried in Alhallow Barking Church mere unto the Tower of London in the Chancell there and Vawte wherein Nicholas Jennyngs my Late Father lyethe buried or els in suche other place as here after I shall appointe. Item I give and bequeathe unto the vicar and curate for the tyme beinge of the saide Church that is to saye unto either of them fortie shillings. Item also my will is and I doe give and bequeathe tenne poundes eighte shillings to be bestowed in breade to be distributed amongst fowre and twentie of the poorest p'rishioners of the sayde parrishe at or by the discrecion of suche Vicar and Curate of the saide church as is aforesayde and Churchwardens then for the tyme beinge or the more parte of them in manner and forme folowinge. That is to saye every Sunday by the space of two yeres next after my deathe two shillinge in breade the aforesaide distribution of breade to be given the next Sunday next after my burial and the two odd loaves beinge the advantage of the aid two dosons weekelie to be given to the Clarke and Sexton of the said P'rishe Church for and in consideration of their paynes in taking in and deliveringe of the sayde breade. Item I give and bequeathe twelve yards of black velvet to the righte honourable my very good Ladie the Ladie Stafford one of the Ladies of Honor of our said Sovereaigne Ladie the Queens ma^{tie} thereof to make her a gowne w^{ch} twelve yards of velvet my will is shall be delivered unto her ymediatelic after my deathe by my Executo^{rs} hereafter named desiringe her to vouchsafe to weare it in a mourninge gowne for me. Item I give and bequeathe unto every of suche my howshould and meniall Servants in ordinarie as have served me by the space of one whole yere next before my deathe and so continue their service at that tyme fortie shillings a peece. Item I will and bequeathe unto Sir William Hayward vicar of Whitegate twentie shillings and also forgive him all the debte wherein he standethe indebted unto me. Item I also give and bequeath unto Margarett Reade sixe poundes thirteene shillings foure pence. Item I give and bequeath unto Thomas Edrithe for and in consideration of his greate paynes taken for me at my howse fortie shillings and also one bed wth all thinges thereunto belonginge wherein he dothe usuallie Lye at my howse at Stretham. And whereas I have heretofore bothe in the preferment of the marriage of my daughter the Ladie Isabell Countesse Dawger of Rutland and late wife to the righte honourable Edward late Earle of Rutland and otherwise in the life tyme of the same Earle her late husband very lardgelie and liberallie bestowed upon her diverse greate sommesof money and other guiftes and also whereas the said Edward late Earle of Rutland I n his life tyme for performance of certaine coven^{ants} w^{ch} upon his partie were to be performed did become bounden unto me and my onelic use by statute staple in the some of fowre thousande poundes of lawful money of England my will is that my daughter the saide Countess upon condicon that she shall not hereafter make any claime unto or wth hold or detayne or take from me or my Executo^{rs} hereafter to be named or any of them any of may goodes Chattells or howshould stuffe whatsoever nor shall interrupte vexe molest or trouble

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myne Executo^{rs} hereafter to be named nor any of them in the execucon and performance of this my last will and testament nor in the administracon of my goodes or Chattells nor in any waise shall intromitt her selfe or deale wth or in the execucon of this my last will and testament or any parte or parcel thereof or in the aministracon of my goodes or Chattells or debts otherwise or in any other manner than is hereafter expresslie declared and limited shall have the saide statute of fower thousand poundes and the penaltie thereof wth all proffitts and commodities that ay arise thereby To have and holde to her most profit and advantage. And to the intente that she permorfinge the condicon the better and more speedelie obteyne have come by and injoye to her onelie use commoditie profit and benefit the saide statute and the penaltie thereof. I do hereby ordayne constitute and appointe my said daughter Isabelle the said Countesse of Rutland my onelie and sole Executo^r onelie to and for that perpose That is to say onelie for the obteyninge gettinge and enjoyinge the benefit of the saide statute staple in manner and forme aforesaid and not to or for any other purpose or to or for or any other manner of execucon of this my last will and testament or any other parte or parcel thereof or administracon of any other goodes Chatells or debts other than onelie concerninge the said statute staple so as is aforesaide. And also my mynde will and intente is that if my said daughter Isabell the said Countesse of Rutland my saide Executo^r to and for and concerninhe the obtayninge ~~the obtayninge~~ of the benefitt of the statute staple to her owne commoditie profit and use as is aforesaide and doe not well and effectivallie accomlishe and performe all and everie the aforemenconed condicons w^{ch} by her are to be performed and kepte accordine to my meaninge herein this my Last will and testament expressed. That then my saide Legacie of the saide bond of fowre thowsand poundes and the penaltie thereof to her bequeathed as is aforesaide and also my no[']iacon of her to be my executor so as is aforesaide shall be utterlie voyde to all intents constructions and purposes and of no manner of validitie or force in Lawe but as if there were never had beene any men[']con thereof in this my Last will and testament any thinge therein conteyned to the contrarie thereof notwth standinge. The rest and residue of all and singular my goodes Chattells movable and unmovable readie money debts Jewells and plate not beinge herein bequeathed or given at the tyme of my deathe my debts beinge payde my legacies performed and my funeral discharged I doe fullie and wholly give and bequeath unto my Executo^{rs} hereafter named Lawfullie takinge upon them the exec[']on of this my Last will and testament And I ordayne make and constitute my welbeloved Cosyn William Borowghe Esquire Controwler of her ma^{ty} Shippes and Roberte Livesaye of Totinge in the Countie of Surrey Esquire and Richard Birkenhead Esquire Recorded of the Cittie of Chester and my deere and welbeloved Servant Will[']m Loo to be my full and absolute executo^{rs} of this my Last will and testament and of every parte and parcel thereof excepte onelie for and concerninge the aforementioned bonde of fowre thousande poundes bequeathed to my saide daughter Isabell the saide Countesse of Rutland if she performe and accomlishe the Condicons afore expressed in manner and forme aforemenconed desinge them as my trust is in them firmelie and iustlie to execute this my saide Last will and testament as they will discharge them selves before the ma^{tie} of god at the iudgment day. And I doe constitute and ordeyne my deerlie beloved sonne ^{and heire} Thomas Holcrofte Esquire to be the Superviso^r and Overseer of this my Last will and testament desiringe him for the filiall Love and obedience that he owghteth to me his loveinge mother and as my greate and speciaall trust is in him that he will not onelie be an ayder and helper of my saide Executo^{rs} for the better performance of this my Last will and testament ~~desiringe~~ and also to see the same p[']formed accordinge to my true meaninge herein declared and so farr for the as he is bounde to doe by certayne articles of agreement betweene me and him heretofore made . And also I doe by this my Last will and testament utterlie renownce and revoke all and every other my former will and wills. In witness whereof I the saide Dame Julian Holcrofte to the my Last will and testament tripartite indented have putt to my hande given the day and yere above menconed. Julian Holcrofte. Witnesses hereof Thomas Baskerville Robert Balton Thomas Hilton Richard Atherton James Hightgoe George Stitha['].

Proved 12 March, 1595-6, by the Dowager Countess of Rutland and the other four executors.

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¹ Haigh, C., *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (1975), p.87.

² Some authorities say he was born at Vale Royal. Whilst he and his son resided at Vale Royal, there is no record of his father having any connection with the abbey.

³ Harland, J. (ed.), *The Lancashire Lieutenancy under the Tudors and Stuarts*, Chetham Society vol 49 (1859), pp. 2, 17.

⁴ Northcote Toller, T., (ed.), *Correspondence of Edward, Third Earl of Derby*, Chetham Society (n.s.) vol. 19 (1890), pp. 6, 9, 10, 85.

⁵ *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 7: 1534* (1883), pp. 569-576.

⁶ *L & P, Volume 7: 1534* (1883), pp. 569-576. The ODNB says of him, in part: "Barlow's career from 1518 to 1534 is obscure, though it has been argued that during the 1520s he was attracted by ideas of religious reform and spent several years abroad. He was the author of *A Dialogue of ... these Lutheran Factions and Many of their Abuses* (1531), an anti-Lutheran pamphlet. Through Anne Boleyn's patronage he became prior of Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, by 1534. Letters written by him to Thomas Cromwell in 1535 show him to be already a fervent reformer. His zeal provoked furious opposition from the clergy of the neighbourhood. They ill-treated his servants and threatened him with violence and persecution. He complained to Cromwell of their blindness and ignorance, averring that 'no diocese is so without hope of reformation'. In 1535 he was removed from hostile Pembrokeshire to the rich priory of Bisham, Berkshire, and was sent on three occasions between October 1535 and June 1536, twice with Lord William Howard, on embassy to Scotland, with the intention of persuading James V to embrace Reformation doctrine. Although unsuccessful, these overtures produced lively exchanges.

⁷ *State Papers Henry VIII*, vol. 5, part IV part 2 (1836) p. 7

⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 10,11

⁹ *L & P, Volume 9: August-December 1535* (1886), pp. 57-81.

¹⁰ *L & P, Volume 11: July-December 1536* (1888), pp. 547-566.

¹¹ Bain, J. ed. *The Hamilton Papers, vol. I 1532-151543*, (1890) p. 33. From hereon dates will be given in the modern fashion as though New Year's Day was on 1 January rather than 26 March as it was then.

¹² *L & P, Volume 6: 1533* (1882), p. 246.

¹³ *L & P, Volume 10: January-June 1536* (1887), pp. 1-12.

¹⁴ *L & P, Volume 14 Part 2: August-December 1539* (1895), pp. 196-208.

¹⁵ *L & P, Volume 14 Part 1: January-July 1539* (1894), pp. 574-593.

¹⁶ *L & P, Volume 14 Part 2: August-December 1539* (1895), pp. 303-358.

¹⁷ *L & P, Volume 16: 1540-1541* (1898), pp. 123-145

¹⁸ *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 12: 1554*(1949), pp. 147-164.

¹⁹ *Annals Furness*, p.340

²⁰ *L & P, Volume 6: 1533* (1882), p. 284-295.

²¹ Haigh, C., p. 124.

²² *L & P, Volume 12 Part 1: January-May 1537* (1890), pp. 367-399.

²³ *L & P, Volume 12 Part 2: June-December 1537* (1891), pp. 85-100. *Annals Furness*, p. 360

²⁴ Dugdale, *Mon.* vi, 454. *L & P, Volume 16: 1540-1541* (1898), pp. 123-145.

²⁵ *L & P, Volume 12 Part 1: January-May 1537* (1890), pp. 557-574

²⁶ *L & P, Volume 21 Part 1: January-August 1546* (1908), pp. 52-78.

²⁷ *L & P, Volume 12 Part 1: January-May 1537* (1890), pp. 557-574.

²⁸ *A History of the County of Lancaster: Volume 2*(1908), pp. 161-162. *L & P, Volume 15*: 831 (43)

²⁹ *L & P, Volume 18 Part 2: August-December 1543* (1902), pp. 115-143.

³⁰ *L & P, Volume 15: 1540* (1896), pp. 251-300; *Volume 16: 1540-1541* (1898), pp. 178-210.

³¹ *A History of the County of Lancaster: Volume 2* (1908), pp. 107-111.

³² *L & P, Volume 21 Part 1: January-August 1546* (1908), pp. 305-334.

³³ *L & P, Volume 9: August-December 1535* (1886), p. 308.

³⁴ Cheshire Record Office: DBC 1621/26/2

³⁵ *L & P, Volume 13 Part 2: August-December 1538* (1893), pp. 116-126.

³⁶ *L & P, Volume 14 Part 1: January-July 1539* (1894), pp. 239-264.

³⁷ DBC 2309/3

³⁸ CRO: DBC 1621/26/9

³⁹ *L & P, Volume 20 Part 2: August-December 1545* (1907), pp. 95-121. *L & P, Volume 21 Part 2: September 1546-January 1547* (1910), pp. 70-100.

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- ⁴⁰ CRO: DCH/J/237, 238. For an account of the dispute see Bostock, A.J. 'A Way through the Woods', *Cheshire History*, vol 47, pp 47-58. (2008)
- ⁴¹ *Lancashire & Cheshire Wills & Inventories*, Chetham Society, vol li, p. 107. LRO: DDBR 20/1 31 May, 1575
- ⁴² *L & P, Volume 17: 1542* (1900), pp. 401-413. Dasent, J. Roche (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, n.s. (1890), vol. i, p. 29
- ⁴³ *L & P, Volume 19 Part 1* (1903), pp. 318-388.
- ⁴⁴ *L & P, Volume 19 Part 1* (1903), pp. 388-401. Bain, J. ed. *The Hamilton Papers, vol. II 1543-1590*, (1892) p. 394
- ⁴⁵ *Hamilton Papers*, p. 413
- ⁴⁶ *L & P, Volume 19 Part 2* (1905), pp. 421-439.
- ⁴⁷ *L & P, Volume 20 Part 2* (1907), pp. 61-74..
- ⁴⁸ *L & P, Volume 21 Part 1* (1908), pp. 305-334.
- ⁴⁹ *APC*, vol. ii, p. 175., *Calendar of State Papers, Elizabeth 1601-3, with addenda 1547-65*, pp. 363-379.
- ⁵⁰ *APC*, vol. ii, p. 234.
- ⁵¹ *Calendar of State Papers, Scotland: volume 1: 1547-63* (1898) pp 164-5.
- ⁵² *Ibid*, p. 107.
- ⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 108.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 115-133
- ⁵⁵ *Hamilton Papers*, p. 600.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 602.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 618
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 624
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 628.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 161.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 163.
- ⁶² *Ibid*, pp. 134-154
- ⁶³ *Scotland*, p. 127.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 115-133.
- ⁶⁵ *APC*, vol. vi., pp. 320, 321.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 135-154
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 164.
- ⁶⁸ *Scotland*, pp. 164, 165.
- ⁶⁹ *Calendar of State Papers, Elizabeth 1601-3, with addenda 1547-65*, pp. 395, 396.
- ⁷⁰ *Scotland*, pp. 174-176.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid*, pp. 177.
- ⁷² 'Mr Secretary Smith' probably refers to Sit Thomas Smith, who was Secretary of State from 1548.
- ⁷³ *Scotland*, p. 180.
- ⁷⁴ *APC*, vol. iii., pp. 87, 89.
- ⁷⁵ *APC*, vol vi, p 439.
- ⁷⁶ *APC*, vol. vi, p. 116
- ⁷⁷ *APC*, vol. vi, pp. 320, 321.
- ⁷⁸ *APC*, vol. iii, p. 391. *The Diary of Henry Machyn: Citizen and Merchant-Taylor of London (1550-1563)* (1848), pp. 3-13.
- ⁷⁹ *APC*, iv, pp. 78, 82, 84. Surrender of all offices is suggested by the Cecil Papers *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Volume 1: 1306-1571* (1883), pp. 94-106.
- ⁸⁰ *APC*, v, p. 31
- ⁸¹ *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 12: 1554*(1949), pp. 147-164.
- ⁸² *Ibid*, pp. 257-265.
- ⁸³ *CSP, Spain, volume 12: 1554*(1949), p.158.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 315-16.
- ⁸⁵ *APC*, v, pp 127, 128, 137; vi, p. 12.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 251, 283
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid*, v. p. 279
- ⁸⁸ Stow, *Annals* (1631) p. 586. Barnes, P.E., (ed.) *Memorials of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury*, 1694. EccI. Hist. Soc., in 3 vols., Oxford, 1848-1854, p. 526

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- ⁸⁹ Nichols, J.G., (ed.) *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation*, Camden Soc. (1860), pp. 187, 196, 210.
- ⁹⁰ Foxe, J. *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p.
- ⁹¹ A. Thrush and J. P. Ferris, (eds.), *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1604-1629* (2010)
- ⁹² PRO: PCC Prob/11/47
- ⁹³ The couple appear in respect of property transactions in the City of London, Barking and elsewhere. *A Calendar to the Feet of Fines for London & Middlesex: volume 2: Henry VII - 12 Elizabeth* (1893), pp. 68-86
- ⁹⁴ Nicholas Jenning's wife was Margaret Mundy, daughter of Sir John Mundy who served as Lord Mayor of London in 1522. The couple married in 1526.
- ⁹⁵ Elizabeth married William Cecil, Lord Burghley, son of the 1st Earl of Exeter, who later succeeded as second Earl. She died in childbirth, in London, at Tower Street, All Hallows, Barking and was buried in Westminster Abbey. She was succeeded in the Barony of Ros, which she inherited from her father, by her son, William.
- ⁹⁶ *Feet of Fines of the Tudor period [Yorks]: part 2: 1571-83* (1888), pp. 60-77. The property in Yorkshire included the manors of Warter, Seyton Rose, Landricke, Nessemore, Storth-whate cum Melborne, and Snailworthe, and the late Priory of Warter, and 300 messuages and 10 mills with lands in the same and in Midelton, Thorneton, Kypplyncotes, Byshope Burton, Lownde, and West Elley, and the Rectories of the churches of Warter and Lownde.
- ⁹⁷ Fry, E.A., (ed.), *Abstracts of Inquisitiones Post Mortem for the City of London: Part 3* (1908), pp. 105-128. Sir Gilbert Gerard was son of James Gerard and Margaret Holcroft, sister of John Holcroft, and aunt to Sir Thomas Holcroft I. Sir Gilbert became attorney general in 1559.
- ⁹⁸ Chetham Society, with introduction by Corser, in 1851, pp 20-23 and 47-50
- ⁹⁹ CRO: P52/1/1. I am indebted to the County Archivist, Jonathan Pepler for providing the transcript from the register and the others which follow.
- ¹⁰⁰ CRO: P 35/5228/1
- ¹⁰¹ 'The sixth daye of August [1595] at iiiire of the clocke in the morning it pleased god to take to his Mercie the Right Worshipfull Elizabeth Holcroft wife of the Right Worshipfull Mr Thomas Holcroft Esq. Of Vale royall Anno predicto'
- 'The xxvith daye of August was buried the Right Worshipfull Elizabeth Holcroft wife of the Right Worshipfull Tho. Holcroft of Vale royall esq.'
- ¹⁰² 26 August 1595: *Eliza' Holcroft uxor Tho. Holcroft de Vale Ryall Armigeri sepult'*
- ¹⁰³ PRO: PCC Prob/11/87
- ¹⁰⁴ *Oxford DNB*: Stafford, Dorothy, (1526–1604).
- ¹⁰⁵ Ann Fitton (1574 - 1618), daughter of Sir Edward was only thirteen when on 30 April 1587 she married John Newdigate aged sixteen.
- ¹⁰⁶ *CSP Dom.* 1581-90, p.669
- ¹⁰⁷ *Abstracts of Inquisitiones Post Mortem for the City of London: Part 3* (1908), pp. 105-128.
- ¹⁰⁸ She died in childbirth in 1591
- ¹⁰⁹ *HMC Hatfield*, x, 236, 253.
- ¹¹⁰ *HMC Hatfield*, xvi, 243
- ¹¹¹ *Gray's Inn Admissions Register*, p. 66
- ¹¹² *Acts of the Privy Council*, vol. 30, 1599-1600. p. 782
- ¹¹³ D'Ewes, pp. 474, 496, 517, 624, 634, 637, 649, 654, 655, 657, 662.
- ¹¹⁴ *HMC Hatfield*, x, 45
- ¹¹⁵ *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Volume 22: 1612-1668* (1971), pp. 115-119. *Volume 24: Addenda, 1605-1668.* (1976).
- ¹¹⁶ *Cal. State Papers (Domestic) Additional 1566-1579*, pp 530-532. Mosley, C. (ed.) *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage*, 107th edition.
- ¹¹⁷ *Acts of the Privy Council*, vols. 24 & 25.
- ¹¹⁸ *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Volume 10: 1600* (1904), pp. 217-235.
- ¹¹⁹ Isabel Holcroft was the widow of Hamnet Holcroft, brother of Sir John Holcroft of Holcroft whose only daughter Alice married Sir Edward Fitton.
- ¹²⁰ *APC*, xxx., pp. 492, 494, 526.
- ¹²¹ *Cheshire and Lancashire Funeral Certificates, 1600-1678*, Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society (1882) vol. 6, p. 110.
- ¹²² *Ibid*, p. x

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¹²³ *Cal. S.P. Dom., 1619–20*, p. 125.