

The Go-Between?

JOHN ASHDOWN-HILL

John Lord Howard, first duke of Norfolk (born *circa* 1425, died 1485) was one of Richard III's most loyal supporters. He had previously been loyal to Edward IV, but he appears to have evinced no hesitation in espousing Richard's cause in the summer of 1483. Entries in his household accounts dating from the 1460s raise the intriguing possibility that John Howard may have been well placed to understand the justice of Richard III's claim to the throne.

In the 1460s he was merely Sir John Howard of Tendring Hall, Stoke-by-Nayland. Through his mother, Lady Margaret Mowbray, who, as his accounts show, was still living in April 1464,¹ Howard was the first cousin of John Mowbray, third Duke of Norfolk (died 1461). He served the third duke of Norfolk, and subsequently the latter's son, the fourth and last Mowbray duke. In fact his position in the 1450s and 1460s was essentially that of a key member of the Mowbray affinity.²

As a result, there is no doubt that John Howard was well acquainted with members of the Talbot family. Elizabeth Talbot, Duchess of Norfolk, the wife of the last Mowbray duke, is mentioned on several occasions in Howard's accounts.³ He lent money to her, bought and sold horses and wine on her behalf, and had the loan of her minstrels. Later he was associated with her in projects, such as the rebuilding of Long Melford church in Suffolk. Howard also knew Elizabeth's only surviving brother, Sir Humphrey Talbot, and her nephew, Thomas Talbot, Viscount Lisle, to both of whom, in May 1465, he delivered gifts from the duke of Norfolk in the form of valuable crimson cloth, – the livery colour of the Mowbray dukes.⁴

Given these contacts, it would not be surprising if Sir John Howard also had connections with the duchess of Norfolk's other two surviving close relatives: her mother, the dowager countess of Shrewsbury, and her sister, Eleanor Talbot, Lady Butler. Contact with Eleanor is particularly likely, given that at this period she was resident in Norfolk. Neither lady is mentioned by

¹ A. Crawford, ed., *The Household Books of John Howard, Duke of Norfolk* (hereafter *Howard Accounts*), Stroud 1992, part 1, p. 186.

² Howard was also steward to Cecily Neville, Duchess of York, in respect of the honour of Clare. He visited her at Clare Castle on 11 June 1465, and frequently sent messages to her there.

³ *Howard Accounts*, part 1, pp. 153, 180, 240, 332, 482, part 2, p. 116.

⁴ *Howard Accounts*, part 1, p. 165. For details of the Talbot family, see the pedigree in the present author's 'The endowments of Lady Eleanor Talbot', *The Ricardian*, vol. 14 (2004), p. 91.

name in Howard's surviving accounts.⁵ There are, nevertheless, intriguing hints of the possibility that Howard may have communicated with both of them on behalf of the duke and duchess of Norfolk.

First, on 23 March 1463, Sir John Howard paid Thomas Yonge, sergeant at law, 13s 4d 'for hys ij dayis labore att the Whyte Freyrs for my lordys matyre'.⁶ The editor of the Howard accounts assumes that this is a reference to the Carmelite Priory in London. There is, however, no justification in the text for such an assumption. It is true that both Howard and the duke of Norfolk seem to have been in London at about this time, but there is nothing to indicate where Thomas Yonge had been, while carrying out his errand.

In 1463 Lady Eleanor Talbot was probably living in her sister's dower house, East Hall, at Kenninghall in Norfolk, and it must have been at about this time, or possibly a few months earlier, that she became a lay oblate of the Norwich Carmel where, five years later, her sister was to provide for her burial. It may be that the business, which Howard, through Thomas Yonge, was conducting with the Whitefriars on the duke and duchess of Norfolk's account, was connected in some way with Lady Eleanor's oblation in respect of the Carmelites.

A few months later, in July 1463, Sir John Howard was again acting as an intermediary for the duke of Norfolk. On this occasion he paid John Davy 16d 'to ryde on my lordys erand to Kenehale [Kenninghall]'.⁷ While the Whitefriars' errand may or may not have been to the priory in Norwich, in this case there is no doubt regarding the destination of the messenger. Given that it is probable that Lady Eleanor was living at Kenninghall at this time, it is not fanciful to suggest that the duke of Norfolk's message on this occasion may well have been addressed to his sister-in-law.

On 7 January 1464, Howard was again paying messengers on behalf of the duke of Norfolk. This time he gave 20d 'to John Frawnces and Lawnesgay, to ryde to Whyte Chyrche on my lordys arende'.⁸ Whitchurch, in Shropshire, was where the dowager countess of Shrewsbury, mother both of Lady Eleanor and of the duchess of Norfolk, had established her dower residence, at the manor of Blakemere.

To sum up, his surviving accounts show that John Howard knew Lady Eleanor Talbot's only sister, Elizabeth, very well. He was also acquainted with her surviving brother, Humphrey, and with her nephew and heir, Thomas.⁹

⁵ The accounts are incomplete. The years 1470-81 are missing. Lady Eleanor and her mother were both dead by 1468, however.

⁶ *Howard Accounts*, part 1, p. 151. The reference to 'my lord' in this and subsequent quotations is to John Mowbray, 4th duke of Norfolk.

⁷ *Howard Accounts*, part 1, p. 153.

⁸ *Howard Accounts*, part 1, p. 160.

⁹ Thomas is named as Eleanor's heir in her *ipm*, the present author's

The possibility now emerges that he also knew, and had dealings with Lady Eleanor herself, and with her mother, Margaret, Countess of Shrewsbury. If this was so, Howard's judgement on the validity of the claim to the throne advanced on behalf of Richard III in the summer of 1483 is particularly

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' The inquisition *post mortem* of Eleanor Talbot', *The Ricardian* vol. 12 (2000-02), p. 567.