



*Argent a chevron between  
three estoiles sable*

## A Bedfordshire Armorial

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XXXVIII—MORDAUNT of Turvey

UNTIL Dr G. H. Fowler dealt with the Drayton and Halstead Charters in the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society's Publications Vol. XI, the *Succinct Genealogies* of the Mordaunts by 'Robert Halstead' was regarded as the main and most reliable source of information about that family and their connections. 'Halstead' was the pseudonym used by Henry Mordaunt, second Earl of Peterborough who, in collaboration with the Revd R. Rands, compiled and published the *Succinct Genealogies* in 1685. Of this rare work only about two dozen copies are known to exist.

After clearing away the cobwebs we find that the earliest known Mordaunt was a certain Osmund who died some time before 1198 and was probably related by marriage, if not by blood, to the de Alneto or de Alno and Ardres families.

These people were holding land in Turvey during his lifetime and are referred to in the cartulary of St Neots Priory. The manor of Turvey was part of the barony of Traily and in 1225 an assize of *mort d'ancestor* cites Eustace Mordaunt and Robert de Ardres as each receiving  $1\frac{1}{2}$  carucates under the overlordship of John Traily. To this Eustace, some quarter of a century previously, William Maunsel of Turvey granted seven acres of his lands there; again in 1235 we find Eustace le Mordaunt coming into possession of land in Turvey formerly owned by Hugh de Alno. It can be shown that this Eustace was the son of Osmund.

From then onwards the Mordaunts held land in Turvey as a manor and it remained their family seat for five centuries in almost unbroken descent from father to eldest son. The first interruption occurs in 1372, when Edmund Mordaunt during a fit of homicidal mania killed his wife Ellen and then drowned himself in the Ouse.

### Changes of Cause and Religion

During the Wars of the Roses, Robert, grandson of this Edmund, impoverished the family estate in support of the Yorkist cause, leaving his widow and his son William to repair the loss when he died in 1448. However, like so many families during internecine struggles, the Mordaunts were not consistently loyal to one side, and William's son John, who succeeded to the manor in 1475, fought and was wounded at Barnet on the Lancastrian side and commanded at Stoke in 1487. He was King's Serjeant in 1495, and was succeeded

in 1504 by his son Sir John, K.B. (c. 1480-1562), whose mother was of the noble house of Latimer. John rose in favour under Henry VIII, and married into the Vere family. He was knighted previous to going to France with the king when he attended the Field of the Cloth of Gold, and afterwards in 1533 was created first Baron Mordaunt of Turvey. Before his death in 1562 he had served the king in several matters concerning the royal marriages. Through his wife he came into possession of the beautiful mansion of Drayton. His tomb is in Turvey church.

The second baron (1508-1571), also a John, was created K.B. in 1555 at Anne Boleyn's coronation. He was M.P. for Bedfordshire and was made a privy councillor by Queen Mary. His effigy with those of his two wives (a Fitzlewis and a Fermor) stands in Turvey Church where there is also a marble slab commemorating his son Lewis (1538-1601) the third baron, who took part in the trials of Mary Queen of Scots and Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk. He had espoused the protestant faith but his son Henry, fourth baron (1567?-1609), reverted in 1601 to the old faith just in time to become suspect and entangled in the Guy Fawkes conspiracy. He found himself imprisoned in the Tower of London long enough to undermine his health, which failed entirely in 1609. His son John (1598-1644) did not go over to Rome. He received from Charles I the title of Earl of Peterborough in 1628, with the concomitant title of Viscount Mordaunt for his eldest son Henry (1623-1697), but showed little gratitude for the earldom (which he probably bought) when a choice had to be made between king and parliament. He supported parliament and did some soldiering under Essex but died just after he had been made a colonel in 1642. His son, on the other hand, had raised a regiment in the king's cause and as second earl and sixth baron had his estates sequestered when that cause was lost. At a cost of some £5,000 he recovered them in 1655 and took no further part in politics. The restoration of the monarchy led to his being made a Privy Councillor, but his later reversion to Rome brought him back into the politico-religious troubles of his age and in 1689 he was impeached for high treason. Fortunately for him the dissolution of parliament caused his case to be dropped and he died a natural death some eight years later. It was he who compiled the *Succinct Genealogies*.

Meanwhile Henry's brother John (1626-1675) had married into the influential Carey family and was created Baron Mordaunt of Reygate and Viscount Avalon. To this John's elder son passed the earldom of Peterborough as the second earl had no son. Two other of the family titles, the baronies of Beauchamp of Bletsoe and Mordaunt, passed to Henry's daughter Mary. To her also went the rich Northamptonshire estate and house at Drayton; originally the home of the Greenes it had passed to the Veres whose heiress married the first Baron (Henry Mordaunt) in the sixteenth century.

### **The Titles reunited**

The third earl, Charles, was born in 1658; he became viscount in 1675 when his father died and earl of Peterborough in 1697 when his uncle died. In 1675, too, he was created Earl of Monmouth, a title which had formerly belonged to his wife's family, the Careys. Moreover, when his cousin Mary died in 1709 as Lady Germain and Baroness Mordaunt, her baronies reverted to him. He had a brother Henry from whom was descended General Sir John Mordaunt who died in 1780. Charles was, of course, the great and adventurous soldier



and politician of Queen Anne's reign, whose career can be read in most histories of the period. He died in 1735 and lies with many of his ancestors buried in Turvey church. His elder son succeeded him as fourth earl and his second son, Capt. Henry (1681-1710) had a short but distinguished career in the army. Charles, fourth earl (1708-1779), was succeeded by his son Charles Henry, fifth and last earl. Having no heir he sold his Turvey estates to Charles Higgins who already occupied Turvey House, and his titles, except the Mordaunt and Beauchamp baronies, became extinct at his death in 1814.

Thus, after some six centuries, the Mordaunts passed out of our county. The Baronies of Mordaunt and Beauchamp passed to the Duke of Gordon and later went into abeyance.

There were two other branches of the family in Bedfordshire, the Mordaunts of Oakley, descended from the third son of the second baron, and those of Northill, descended from George, brother of the first baron. There were also branches in Norfolk (from William, elder brother of the first baron) and in Essex (from the third son of the first baron).

The Mordaunt arms are very simple and may have been originally just a black chevron on a silver shield. We do not know when the *estoiles* or stars were added but they were recorded in a roll of Edward I's reign as being borne by William Mordaunt.

The crest of the Mordaunts of Turvey is *out of an earl's coronet or, a bust of a Moorish prince habited of the first (dressed in gold) wreathed about the temples argent and sable*, as displayed on the monuments in Turvey church. The Northill and Norfolk branches vary this slightly, Northill having a 'blackamoor's' head and the mullet for the mark of a third son, Norfolk a 'Saracen's' head.

With the earldom came the right to have supporters and Peterborough was granted two silver eagles *with wings expanded issuing from behind the shield*, a handsome and unusual way of displaying supporters. Their motto was '*Ne placido contenta quiete est*'.

There is another family of Mordaunts whose arms are similar but have spear-heads instead of *estoiles*, but their possible relation to the Turvey family is not known.

## ***What do you know about Bedfordshire?***

1. When was the last action taken against a Bedfordshire resident for non-attendance at church? Who were the plaintiff and defendant? What was the verdict?
2. What obsolete Shillington industry gave work to about 1,400 men during the winter months?
3. When and where did the last Beauchamp of Bedford die?
4. Anagram of a Bedfordshire village: RYE ISLE.
5. Which Queen of England is descended from a vicar of Ridgmont and a rector of Cockayne Hatley?
6. What are the three most popular dedications of pre-Reformation churches in Bedfordshire? In England?
7. What price did the Cecil Higgins Museum at Bedford pay for J. M. W. Turner's watercolour 'First rater taking in stores'?
8. Which Bedfordshire author wrote a temperance tract called *A Delicate Diet for daintie mouthed Droonkards*?

(Answers on page 290)